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AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

**CREATING A COMMUNITY OF GRACE:
A HISTORY OF THE PUṢṬI MARGA IN NORTHERN AND WESTERN INDIA
(1493-1905)**

By

Shandip Saha

Dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate and Post-Doctoral Studies, University of Ottawa,
in partial fulfillment for the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Department of Classics and Religious Studies
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
Introduction.....	1
Previous Literature on the Puṣṭi Mārga	3
Kings, Brahmins, Patronage	14
Sources	18
Plan of Study	22
 Chapter 1: Setting the Stage: The Practice of Religious Patronage in Medieval India.....	 25
1.1 Religious Patronage and Political Authority in Medieval India	26
1.1.1 Medieval Indian Temples as Cultural and Economic Centers.....	29
1.2 The Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate.....	31
1.2.1 Patronage of Sufis During the Sultanate Period.....	34
1.2.2 Patronage of Hindus During the Sultanate Period.....	38
1.2.3 Monotheistic Devotional Communities.....	40
1.2.4 Interaction Between Sufis, Sants, and Nāth Yogis in the Medieval Period	43
1.2.5 The Limits of Sufi Tolerance.....	49
1.2.6 Evaluating the Religious Landscape of The Sultanate Period	53

...

1.3 The Consolidation of the Mughal Empire in North India	55
1.3.1 The Consolidation of Mughal Power	56
1.3.2 Religion and State Policy Under the Mughals	57
1.3.3 Orthodox Muslim Reactions Against Mughal Religious Policy.....	62
1.4 Conclusion	64
 Chapter 2: Vaiṣṇava Traditions of Braj.....	67
2.1 Tracing the Origins of Kṛṣṇaite Bhakti and Kṛṣṇaite Devotional Literature	69
2.1.1 Vaiṣṇava Bhakti Communities.....	72
2.1.2 Regional Manifestations of Kṛṣṇaite Bhakti.....	76
2.2 The Early History of Braj.....	78
2.2.1 The Transformation of Braj	80
2.2.2 Mughal Patronage of Braj in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.....	85
2.2.3 Braj from the Mid-Seventeenth Century to the End of the Eighteenth Century.....	89
2.3 Conclusion: Evaluating the Growth of Braj in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.....	90
 Chapter 3 : Tracing the History of the Puṣṭi Mārga (1493-1670).....	95
3.1 Vallabha and the Establishment of the Puṣṭi Mārga.....	98
3.1.1 Vallabha's Travels Through India.....	107
3.1.2 Evaluating the Importance of Vallabha's Travels.....	111
3.2 The Ascendancy of Viṭṭhalaṅkār to the Leadership of the Puṣṭi Mārga.....	118
3.2.1 The Growth of the Puṣṭi Mārga under Viṭṭhalaṅkār.....	120
3.3 The Continued Expansion of the Puṣṭi Mārga: 1585 to 1670 C.E	128

3.3.1 The Puṣṭi Mārga from 1585 to 1670: Formation of Community Identity.....	129
3.4 Disputes Within The Puṣṭi Mārga.....	134
3.5 Evaluating the History of the Puṣṭi Mārga within the Context of the Religious History of Medieval North India.....	139
Chapter 4: The Royal House of Mewar and the Politics of Rajasthan.....	145
4.1 From The East India Company to the British Raj.....	147
4.1.1 British Paramountcy and the Theory of Indirect Rule.....	149
4.1.2 The Politics of Power in Rajasthan.....	155
4.1.3 Rajasthan Under Indirect Rule.....	158
4.2 The History of Mewar: From the Origins to the Fall of the Mughals.....	162
4.2.1 The Breakdown of the Mewar Political System and the Ascendancy The British	165
4.2.2. Conclusion.....	171
Chapter 5: Being Gurus and Jāgirdārs: The Growth of the Puṣṭi Mārga in Rajasthan (1671-1880).....	173
5.1 The Entry of the Third House into Mewar.....	175
5.1.1 The Establishment of the Nathdvara House	178
5.2 Religious Networking and the Mahārājas' Involvement in Rajasthani Politics	180
5.2.1 Involvement in Regional Politics	188
5.3 Conflicts Between the Nathdvara and Kankaroli Houses	198
5.4 Legitimizing the Authority of the Tilkāyats.....	203
5.4.1 The Relationship Between Rulers and Puṣṭi Mārga Mahārājas in Devotional Literature.....	207
5.5 Conclusion	214

Chapter 6: The Darbār, the British, and the Runaway Mahārāja: The Transformation of the Nathdvara-Mewar Relationship	220
6.1 The Reign of Giridhar as Tilkayāt of Nathdvara	221
6.2 The Ouster of Giridhar	229
6.2.1 The Exile of Giridhar.....	234
6.3 Giridhar in Bombay.....	239
6.3.1 The Aftermath of the Court Trial.....	248
6.4 Conclusion	253
 Chapter 7: Colonial Rule and Religious Reform: A Short History of the Bombay Presidency in the Nineteenth Century.....	 257
7.1 Orientalist Scholarship and the Colonial Quest for Administrative Order	259
7.2 The Foundations of Colonial Rule in the Bombay Presidency	265
7.2.1 The Merchant Communities of the Presidency	267
7.2.2 The Emergence of the Western Educated Elite	273
7.3 Conclusion.....	278
 Chapter 8: A Community Divided: The Puṣṭi Mārga and the Maharaja Libel Case.....	 280
8.1 The Growth and Consolidation of the Puṣṭi Mārga Presence in the Bombay Presidency.....	282
8.1.1 Reform Criticism of the Puṣṭi Mārga.....	283
8.2 The Maharaja Libel Case.....	290
8.2.1 The Case for the Plaintiff.....	293
8.2.2. Arguments for the Defense.....	298
8.2.3 The Final Judgement	304

8.3	Conclusion: The Aftermath and the End of the ‘Golden Age’	308
-----	---	-----

	Conclusion: Themes in the History of the Puṣṭi Mārga	316
--	---	------------

	Gods and Kings: Who Held Power ?	321
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	Gods or Gurus.....	323
--	--------------------	-----

	Glossary	327
--	----------------	-----

	Bibliography.....	331
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ABSTRACT

This thesis will seek to explore the dynamics of religious patronage in colonial and pre-colonial India by tracing the history of a religious community from Western India called the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. This community was founded in North India by the sixteenth century philosopher Vallabha, but by the nineteenth century, the spiritual leaders of the community had become wealthy, affluent landowners who ruled over their own private estates in the state of Rajasthan. This was largely due to the generous patronage that came from members of the Indian mercantile community as well as from members of both the Muslim and Hindu nobility. This thesis will argue that the patronage of this community by both Hindu and Muslim nobility was, in part, rooted in the common assumption of rulers that patronage of religious communities was not only religiously meritorious, but also essential to the craft of state-building, and to maintaining social stability, and social prestige. The relationship dynamics between the religious leaders of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and its patrons, however, was constantly fluctuating. Mercantile patrons, royal patrons, and spiritual leaders were all socially influential people, but neither exercised absolute dominance over the other. The balance of power constantly shifted between the three groups making it difficult to clearly define the relationship between the community's religious leaders and their supporters.

Introduction

The *Vallabha Sampradāya*, more popularly known as the *Puṣṭi Mārga* (The Path of Grace) was a Kṛṣṇaite devotional community founded in the sixteenth century by the philosopher, Vallabha. Vallabha emphasized the importance of living a life grounded in a single-minded devotion to Kṛṣṇa and in a desire to rely on nothing else in life but his grace. Vallabha took this message and traveled throughout India attracting devotees who would make up the members of his devotional community which was then guided by his son and successor, Viṭṭhalnāth. Before his death, Viṭṭhalnāth divided the spiritual leadership of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* among his seven sons creating the seven branches within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* known as the “Seven Houses.” Of the seven houses, it would be the first house which would retain possession of Śrīnāthjī, the principal image of Kṛṣṇa worshipped in the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The descendants of Viṭṭhalnāth came to be known as *mahārājas* and acted as the spiritual heads (*gurus*) of the community. The *mahārājas*, however, were not renunciates. All *mahārājas* were married and led lives as householders who maintained large extended families. It was these *mahārājas* who would spread the beliefs of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* throughout Northern India in the pilgrimage area of Braj and Western India where it continues to flourish today in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. The Śrīnāthjī temple, the community’s central site of pilgrimage, is located in Rajasthan in the town of Nathdvara and is considered today to be one of the wealthiest temples in India.

The history of the *mahārājas* is a fascinating one. Throughout their history, the *mahārājas* actively sought converts from the mercantile and political elites of Western and Northern India and would use this patronage to transform themselves into wealthy, affluent landlords. Their aristocratic lifestyle and their large estates would at the same time, however, open the *mahārājas* to much controversy in the nineteenth century leading to accusations of immoral behavior by a number of critics including British Orientalist scholars. This is the reason that this community has been sorely neglected in Western scholarship despite the fact that its history can reveal much about the nature of religion and society in both medieval and colonial India. This thesis will attempt to contribute to the small body of scholarship on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by tracing the history of this community and then use it as a case study to understand the complexity of religious patronage in India.

Previous Literature on the Puṣṭi Mārga

The Orientalist scholars who wrote about the *Puṣṭi Mārga* tended to be less than flattering. The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* described the *Puṣṭi Mārga* as the way of eating, drinking, and enjoyment and dubbed the *mahārājas* “The Epicureans of India” who drew inspiration from Vallabha’s hedonist teachings.¹ Horace Hyman Wilson, considered to be one of the foremost Indologists of his time, again continued to develop this image of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in his series of essays entitled *A Religious Sketch*

¹ D Mackichan, "Vallabha, Vallabhacharya," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921), vol. 12, pp. 580-583.

of the *Hindus*. He contrasted the life of self-mortification and solitude of Hindu ascetics with the *mahārājas* who he claimed worshipped God in the midst of adoring devotees who would offer their wives for the sexual enjoyment of their *gurus*.² The allegations concerning the sexual indiscretions of the *mahārājas* would ultimately culminate in a sensational trial in Bombay known as the Maharaja Libel Case, which would be published in 1865 by the defendant in the trial, Karsandas Mulji.³ Matters were not helped either by the prominent sociologist, Max Weber. In his book, *The Religions of India*, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was again singled out for its rituals which Weber described as being nothing but orgies.⁴

Thus due to Orientalist scholarship, the scholarly work relating to the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* has been rather slim. Serious scholarship on the community began to appear during the 1930s when articles and monographs on aspects of Vallabha's life and thought were published by Helmuth von Glasenapp, Amarnath Ray, and G.H Bhatt. Bhatt's, *Śrī Vallabhāchārya and His Doctrines*, probably constitutes the first introduction in English to the major themes in Vallabha's thought including his *Aṇubhāṣyam* and his important commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* known as *Subodhinī*.⁵ Bhatt's work would be

² H. H. Wilson, *A Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1977), pp. 125-136.

³ Karsandas Mulji, *History of the Sect of the Maharajas, or Vallabhacharyas, in Western India* (London: Trubner and Co., 1865).

⁴ Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, trans. Hans Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 314-316.

⁵ See Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Doctrines of Vallabhāchārya*, trans. Ishverbhai S Amin (Baroda: Shri Vallabha Publications, 1984). This was originally published as an article in German called "Die Lehre Vallabhācāryas," *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik*, pp. 322-30. Also see G.H Bhatt, "Viṣṇuvāṃśi and Vallabhāchārya," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Seventh All-India Oriental Conference* (1935), pp.

later followed by the research of M.T. Telivala, whose short English introductions to the critical editions of Vallabha's works still constitute excellent and insightful presentations of Vallabha's philosophical system.⁶

The much later monograph of Mrudula Marfatia's entitled *The Philosophy of Vallabhāchārya* has continued scholarly interest in Vallabha's philosophical thought. Her text is detailed and comprehensive, but it unfortunately does not pay enough attention to Vallabha's extremely important devotional work, *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*.⁷ These sixteen short Sanskrit treatises, which specifically outline Vallabha's path of devotion, are read widely in translation by *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees and are considered key texts in their daily devotional lives. In Marfatia's book, however, the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ* becomes overshadowed by her focus on the very technical aspects of Vallabha's works which tend to be irrelevant to the average devotee. Richard Barz's *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhāchārya*, in this context, has been an important milestone in the English scholarship of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.⁸ It has long been the standard reference in scholarly circles concerning Vallabha's thought because of its detailed reading of the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ* and has

449-465 and his G.H. Bhatt, "A Further Note on Viṣṇusvāmī and Vallabhāchārya," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Eighth All-India Oriental Conference* (1937), pp. 322-328. Finally see Bhatt's collection of essays, *Śrī Vallabhāchārya and His Doctrines* (Baroda: Shri Vallabha Publications, 1980). Amarnath Ray's Article is entitled "The Viṣṇusvāmin Riddle." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute* XIV (1932-33), pp. 161-181.

⁶ M. T. Telivala, *Suddhādvaita Brahmanvāda: The Complete Works of M.T. Telivala.*, ed. Kedarnath Mishra (Varanasi: Anand Prakashan Sansthan, 1980).

⁷ Mrudula Marfatia, *The Philosophy of Vallabhāchārya* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967).

⁸ Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhāchārya* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992).

recently been complimented by James Redington's new rendering of the same work.⁹ Barz's book never contained a full translation or publication of the actual Sanskrit text thus making Redington's work the first full scholarly, annotated English translation of these important devotional texts.

The scholarly work on Vallabha's devotional treatises do provide an important foundation upon which to understand the worship practiced within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* known as *seva*. The material to trace the evolution of *seva* practices, however, is very little. There are no *seva* manuals that can be attributed to Vallabha or his two sons, and the published ritual manuals that have been traced back to the medieval period are attributed to Vallabha's grandson.¹⁰ The manuals which are used by devotees date from the late nineteenth century onwards with the most popular *seva* manual being *Śrīnāth Seva Rasodadhi* which was published in 1981.¹¹ Thus emphasis in scholarly work has been on contemporary *seva* practices. Bennett's short article, "In the House of Krishna," serves as an excellent introduction to the general logic behind *seva* rituals while other monographs have dealt specifically with different components of *Puṣṭi*

⁹Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna: The Sixteen Verse-Treatises (Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ) of Vallabhacharya*, trans. James L. Redington. (Delhi: Sri Satguru Press, 2000).

¹⁰ See Gokulnāth, *Rahasya Bhāvanā Nikuñj Bhāvanā* (Mathura: Śrī Bajarang Pustaklāya, 2002).

¹¹ See Raghunāth Śivji, *Śrī Vallabha Puṣṭi Prakāś* (Bombay: Khemdas Kṛṣṇadās, 1906.) and Baldev Śarma, *Śrīnāth Seva Rasodadhi* (Bombay: Smt. Rukminibai Vallabhdas Karani, 1981).

Mārga seva.¹² Toomey's *Food From the Mouth of Krishna* deals with the religious meanings of food within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, while Amit Ambalal's *Krishna as Shrinathji* and Anne-Marie Gaston's *Krishna's Musicians* have focussed on the art of temple painting and devotional music respectively.¹³

Those studies, however, that seek to present a more integrated approach to understanding the dynamics of religious life in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* have been the monographs which have focussed on pilgrimage practices within the community. Thus sociologists Hanuman Verdia and Rajendra Jindel have both written monographs which have focussed their attention on Nathdvara, the principal pilgrimage center for devotees in the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.¹⁴ Peter Bennett, on the other hand, has written a very sensitive and perceptive study of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in the city of Ujjain entitled *The Path of Grace*. This remains by far the best comprehensive English introduction to the community because of its careful attention to the philosophical, artistic, ritual, and literary dimensions of *Puṣṭi Mārga* religiosity.

It is not surprising, then, that the emphasis placed upon the doctrinal and lived dimensions of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in scholarly literature has unfortunately come at the expense of historical studies of the community. The writings of British Orientalists on

¹² Peter Bennett, "In Nanda Baba's House: The Devotional Experience in Puṣṭi Mārgi Temples," in *The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, ed. Owen Lynch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 182-211.

¹³ Amit Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji* (Allahabad: Mapin, 1995) and Anne-Marie Gaston, *Krishna's Musicians: Musicians and Music Making in The Temples of Nathdvara, Rajasthan* (Delhi: Manohar, 1997).

the history of the community could hardly be called reliable. Their writings reflected the general consensus of nineteenth century European scholars that contemporary Hindu communities like the *Puṣṭi Mārga* were degenerate forms of the pure and pristine monotheism practiced by the ascetics of ancient India. The earliest, reliable historical record that exists in English concerning the *Puṣṭi Mārga* dates back to the early nineteenth century and is to be found in James Tod's memoirs entitled *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. Tod, a British Civil Servant working in Rajasthan, maintained a very warm relationship with the *mahārājas* of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and had briefly described his personal experiences with the *mahārāja* of Nathdvara and translated into English the original land grants issued to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by the Mewar royal house.¹⁵

After *Annals and Antiquities*, however, there seems to have been precious little published about the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* outside the work of individuals like H.H. Wilson or Weber. The 1882 publication of Growse's *Mathura: A District Memoir* yields some very brief details about the landholdings of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Braj just as Erskine's 1908 Gazetteer for the Mewar Residency gives some brief details about the land holdings of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Rajasthan.¹⁶ Neither, however, could be called an

¹⁴ Rajendra Jindel, *Culture of a Sacred Town: A Sociological Study of Nathdvara* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976) and Hanuman Verdia, *Religion and Structure in a Sacred Town, Nathdvara* (Delhi: Researchco Publications, 1982).

¹⁵ James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, or, the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*, 2 vols. (London: Roulledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1914). See vol.1, pp. 415-424, 436, 442-443.

¹⁶ See, F.S Growse, *Mathura: A District Memoir* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1993), pp. 282-298, 301-302 and Keith David Erskine, *Rajputana Gazetteers*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Vintage Books, 1908; reprint, 1992), pp. 113, 119-120.

analytical history of the community. It was K.M Jhaveri's *Imperial Farmans*, published in 1928, that was truly a milestone in scholarship concerning the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.¹⁷ Jhaveri's work was not a sustained historical work on the community, but was important for it contained the texts for all the Persian land grants issued to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by the Mughals which Jhaveri then translated into English, Hindi, and Gujarati.

Jhaveri's *Imperial Farmans* were followed in the thirties by the writings of Bhatt, Telivala, Ray, and Glasenapp, after which scholarship on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* seems to have been continued mostly in Hindi. Initial historical scholarship on the community, however, tended to be dominated mostly by well-known critics of Hindi literature. These scholars were working on critical collections of poetry written by the eight prominent medieval Kṛṣṇaite devotional poets collectively known as the "Eight Seals" (*aṣṭachāp*) who were said to have been disciples of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalnāth. Though the intention of authors like Dīndayālu Gupta, Hazārīprasād Dvivedī, and Nandadulārē Vājpeyī was not to create a body of scholarship on the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, their collation of manuscripts and their search for reliable biographical details in both sectarian and non-sectarian literature yielded much important information about sources concerning the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.¹⁸ The outgrowth of these literary studies has been Hariharanāth Taṇḍan's study of *Puṣṭi Mārga* hagiography otherwise known as *vārtā* literature.¹⁹ The *vārtā* literature,

¹⁷ Krishnalal Mohanalal Jhaveri, *Imperial Farmans, A.D. 1577 to A.D. 1805, Granted to the Ancestors of His Holiness the Tikayat Maharaj* (Bombay: News Printing Press, 1928).

¹⁸ See Hazārīprasād Dvivedī, *Sūr Sāhitya* (New Delhi: Rājkamal Prakāśan, 1973), Dīndayālu Gupta, *Aṣṭachap Aur Vallabha Sampraday*, vol. 1 (Prayag: Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan, 1970), and Nandadulārē Vājpeyī, *Mahākavi Sūrdās* (Delhi: Rājkamal Prakāśan, 1976).

written in medieval Hindi and compiled between the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, has always served as the principal source of literature for reconstructing the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* under the leadership of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalnāth.

Consequently, Taṇḍan's study, which still remains the only sustained study of this literature, is an important reference work concerning the dating of the *vārtā* literature and the collections of published and unpublished manuscripts related to the Hindi devotional literature of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.

The examination of the *vārtā* literature has been the basis for three important narrative histories of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* of which two were written by Prabhudayāl Mītal in 1968. Mītal, a member of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and one of the most illustrious historians of the Braj region, wrote a chapter on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in his history of Braj's religious communities entitled *Braj Dharm Sampradāyō kā Itihās*. The chapter, based on his synthesis of unpublished manuscripts and the *vārtā* literature, produced a detailed history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* under the leadership of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalnāth which, for a sectarian history, still showed a remarkable attention to critical historical method. Mītal would later release that same year a separate monograph meant to be a comprehensive overview of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s presence in Braj until the time of the book's publication in 1968.²⁰ The third narrative history, though much older than Mītal's work, serves as an excellent compliment to Mītal's scholarship. Kaṇṭhmaṇī Śāstrī's large 1932 history of

¹⁹ Hariharanāth Taṇḍan, *Vārtā Sāhitya: Ek Bṛihat Adhyāyan* (Aligārh: Bharat Prakāśan, Mandir, 1960).

the third branch of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* entitled, *Kāṃkāroli kā Itihas*, was based on the collections in the private library of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* temple in Kankaroli, Rajasthan.²¹ It contained reproductions of Mewari land grants and correspondence, unpublished texts in Sanskrit, and an enormous amount of narrative details about the *mahārājas* and their relationships to the Mewar royal family making it the definitive text concerning the history of *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Rajasthan.

The main shortcoming of Hindi scholarship, however, was its tendency to remain very reverential to its subject matter. Scholars like Mītal and Śāstrī may have poured over numerous manuscripts and sought to sift truth from fiction, but they were still devotees who were not willing to sacrifice their religious convictions and beliefs for the sake of critical scholarship. Thus while Hindi scholarship on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was pioneering for bringing to light new historical evidence and seeking to provide some sort of chronological account of the community's history, the task of critical scholarship was left to be taken up again by Western scholars with controversial results. John Stratton Hawley's rich study of the revered saint-poet, Sūrdās, for example, rejected the claims of the *vārtā* literature that the much loved poet was a direct disciple of Vallabha, whose poems explicitly reflected the theological tenets of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.²² In a similar vein, Alan Entwistle's chapters on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in his reference work on the pilgrimage

²⁰ Prabhudayāl. Mītal, *Braj Dharm Sampradāyo kā Itihās* (Mathura: Delhi: National Publishing House, 1968). The second by Mītal is *Brajastha Vallabha Sampradāy kā Itihās* (Mathura: Sāhitya Samsthān, 1968).

²¹ Kaṇṭhamāṇi. Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroli kā Itihās* (Kāṃkāroli: Kāṃkāroli Vidyā Vibhāg, 1939).

²² John Stratton Hawley, *Sūr Dās: Poet, Singer, and Saint* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984).

area of Braj relied almost solely on Hindi scholarship only to reject many sectarian claims as being ahistorical or exaggerated.²³ Charlotte Vaudeville, too, would reject the community accounts of its history by speculating that the Śrīnāthjī image currently housed in Nathdvara was actually a local Śaivite deity from Braj which was appropriated by the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and turned into an image of Kṛṣṇa.²⁴

An equally strong rejection of claims made by the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would come from Richardson's unpublished doctoral thesis entitled "The Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas, The Vallabha Samrpadaya, 1640-60 A.D."²⁵

Richardson attempted to argue that the manner in which devotional communities in India have managed to survive has been through the manipulation of power, economics, social dominance, and the values of purity and pollution. Thus religious leaders of devotional communities were not necessarily reformers or dispassionate holy men, but more like business entrepreneurs who found the means to expand their economic bases in order to maintain their temples and continually aggrandize their social influence in Indian society. Religious leaders, according to Richardson, accomplished this by building ties with wealthy patrons and enhancing their images by claiming ancestry from some sort of charismatic founder who had the aura of a holy man. Thus devotional communities, according to Richardson, are not typically about championing the poor or promoting

²³ Alan Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen: Forsten, 1997), pp. 141-143, 151-155, 160-166, 177-179.

²⁴ Charlotte Vaudeville, "Multiple Approaches to a Living Myth: The Lord of Govardhan Hill," in *Myths, Saints, and Legends in Medieval India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 158-186.

²⁵ Edwin Allen Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of Maharajas, the Vallabha Sampradaya, 1640-1760" (Ph.D, University of Arizona, 1979).

egalitarianism, but quite the opposite. The need for economic survival necessitated patronage which benefited not only the temple, but also the status of religious leaders who would seek to maintain their dominance through the manipulation of religious symbols and ideas.²⁶

Richardson thus applies his thesis to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by arguing that the historical Vallabha was a rather ordinary individual who rejected the ascetic quest for enlightenment to lead a life as a humble householder and prolific writer of religious texts. It was after his death that his descendants started to refashion his image by portraying him as the standard Hindu holy man, who toured India on pilgrimages, took part in religious debates, and performed superhuman feats. Having created a more acceptable image of Vallabha for mainstream Hindu society, Vallabha's descendants consciously modeled themselves on this new image in order to expand their economic power and social influence. Thus they courted the Mughals and Rājapūts who were willing to ally themselves with the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to maintain dominance over their subjects.²⁷ Thus Richardson depicts Indian society as being ordered by a type of alliance between *brahmins* and kings, who use each other in order to exercise their dominance over a larger population who, in Richardson's work, seems to simply acquiesce to their combined power.

²⁶ Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage," pp. 19-30.

²⁷ Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage," pp. 111-118.

Kings, Brahmins, Patronage

What Richardson depicts as the ascendancy of the purity oriented *brahmin* in Indian society bears a small resemblance to the view of Indian society put forth by Louis Dumont in his classic study of Hindu society entitled *Homo Hierarchus*. Dumont argued that Indian society was ordered upon the distinction between the pure and the impure and, consequently, the purity oriented *brahmin* was considered to be at the apex of Indian society because he stood as the highest example of spiritual values. The king, however, could only remain subordinate to the *brahmin* for all he could do was rule in the impure world of power and brute force. Thus Dumont stated that there was an absolute distinction in Indian society between the realm of the spiritual occupied by the *brahmin* and the realm of the temporal occupied by the king and, regardless of his secular power, the king always remains inferior to the *brahmin*.²⁸

Jan Heesterman would later take Dumont's thesis one step further in his collection of essays entitled the *Inner Conflict of the Tradition*. Heesterman argued that the rituals a *brahmin* performed to ensure the spiritual welfare of the king's lands allowed him to achieve an ideal state of worldly transcendence. Thus, in other words, the *brahmin* was able to attend to the mundane activities without being affected by them because of his level of purity. The king, however, who sought to enter into this realm of the

²⁸ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchus*, trans. Mark Sainsbury, Louis Dumont, Basia Gulati (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 65-91.

transcendent, was unable to do so because he always remained mired in the impure realm of the mundane world. Thus Heesterman confirmed Dumont's assertion that the realm of the king was devoid of anything of value for he again ruled by force and power. The realm of the political thus again remained inferior to that of the spiritual.²⁹

Arthur Maurice Hocart, however, argued quite the opposite stating that the authority of a king to rule over his lands did not come through the use of brute force. It was, rather, through religious authority. Hocart certainly acknowledged the importance of the *brahmin's* role in protecting the spiritual welfare of a king's realm, but he also emphasized that the temple rituals performed at the time of a king's coronation ceremony transformed and infused the ruler with the divine power necessary to rule over his lands. Thus Hocart emphasized that once the coronation ceremony was complete, there was no absolute distinction to be made between the ruler and the temple deity whose power he received at the time of his coronation. The temple and the palace were virtually indistinguishable for not only was the king now representative of the deity, he himself became a deity as well. The king, Hocart argued, was not a secondary figure in Indian society. He was very much at its center.³⁰

Nicholas Dirks' monograph, *The Hollow Crown*, seems to support Hocart's view of Indian society. Dirks argues that it was the fundamental activity of a ruler to engage in acts of patronage that could range from the distribution of royal titles and honors to the

²⁹ J.C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of the Tradition: Essays in India Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 10-26.

distribution of goods and services among his subjects. The acceptance of patronage therefore was the equivalent of sharing in a ruler's generosity and sovereignty by becoming a symbol of the stability brought about by royal rule. Where one stood now within the ruler's kingdom, however, was wholly dependent on the nature and importance of the gift bestowed upon the recipient. Thus a type of political hierarchy was created on the basis of the patronage that was determined by the king himself. While the royal patronage of *brahmins* was an acknowledgement of their religious influence in maintaining the well-being of the kingdom, the acceptance of that royal gift equally made them emblems of royal sovereignty. The spiritual presence of the *brahmin* was acknowledged but mediated through the king in order to enhance his power.³¹

The weakness, however, with arguments mentioned above is that they all formulate a view of Indian society that seeks to establish the privileged nature of one social group to whom all other groups are subordinated. The result is a very fixed picture of Indian society which seems to deny the possibility of a society shaped by the ambiguities, conflicts, and tensions generated by the competing and conflicting interests of multiple social groups. This static depiction of Indian society is precisely the problem with Richardson's study concerning the patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Richardson is correct in identifying the relationship between religious patronage, economic expansion, social influence, and state building and he is equally correct in stating that these are all very important themes in the patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. He is equally correct in noting the

³⁰ Arthur Hocart, *Caste: A Comparative Study* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), pp. 34-57.

importance of the legitimative functions of religious literature and that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was unusual in being a householder community which actively pursued religious patronage to their economic advantage. Richardson's study, nonetheless, is weakened by its failure to properly contextualize the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. There is very little attention given to the dynamics of religion and politics in North India, how these processes may have given rise to devotional communities like the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, and how the complexities of North Indian society may have impacted on the institutional and doctrinal development of Vallabha and his descendants. Richardson reduces the entire history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* during the Mughal period to the themes of power and control thus maintaining the stereotype of Indian society being dominated by ambitious *brahmins*.

What this thesis seeks to accomplish is to revisit the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and trace its relationship with its mercantile and royal patrons against the backdrop of the larger social, economic, and political changes that occurred between the periods of the Delhi Sultanate and the early decades of the twentieth century. This thesis will argue that Vallabha founded the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in the sixteenth century as a spiritual response to the troubled political times of the Sultanate, but by the nineteenth century it would be very different from the sixteenth century community Vallabha had started. This was due to the leadership of the *mahārājas*, whose close ties with the political and economic elites of Western and Northern India, ensured that they would become wealthy landowners with a considerable amount of social influence.

³¹ Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.132-138, 249.

Thus the patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by both Mughal and *Rājput* rulers tended to reflect the general tendency of Hindu and Muslim rulers to use patronage to further the task of state building by encompassing religious communities within the framework of the state. For Hindu noblemen and mercantile elites, however, the special attraction of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* seemed to lay in its life affirming message that stressed the compatibility between the quest for liberation and the pursuit of one's worldly duties. Such an alternative opened up venues for greater social mobility, more social prestige, and significant economic and political benefits that came with sheltering the community's images and *mahārājas* within the domain of a royal kingdom. The power of *brahmins*, kings, or merchants, however, was never absolute within the community. All three groups had tremendous social influence in Indian society, but changing political circumstances, conflicting interests, and conflicting personalities ensured that the balance of power would constantly shift back and forth between the *mahārājas* and their patrons.

Sources

The principal sources for reconstructing the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* are the hagiographical texts known as the *vārtā* literature. The first of these collections, known as the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, is a collection of didactic tales about the life of Vallabha and eighty-four of his most prominent disciples which was said to be compiled by Vallabha's grandson, Gokulnāth (1557-1640). The *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan* was followed by the *Nījvārtā* and *Gharūvārtā* which were both a biography of Vallabha and his family which is said to have been completed around 1630 again by Gokulnāth. Towards the end

of the seventeenth century, commentaries were added to the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* by Gokulnāth's nephew, Harirāy (1590 ? –1715).³² The next important body of literature is the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, another set of didactic stories about the life of Viṭṭhalnāth and his two hundred and fifty-two exemplary disciples. This text seems to have been completed by the early part of the eighteenth century. One final important text, again attributed to Harirāy, is *Śrīnāthji ke Prakāṭya kī Vārtā*, written in the eighteenth century which recounts the history of the Śrīnāthji image from its discovery by Vallabha until the establishment of Nathdvara.³³

³² The *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* exists in a commentarial and pre-commentarial form. The earliest manuscript for the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* exists with a colophon bearing the date of 1601 C.E. The earliest manuscript of the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* in its commentarial form exists with a colophon bearing the date of 1695 C.E.

The edition used in this thesis is *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (Indore: Vaiṣṇav Mitr Maṇḍal, 1992). For the *Nijvārtā* and *Gharuvārtā*, see Gokulnāth, *Śrī Ācārya Mahāprabhuji kī Nijvārtā, Gharuvārtā, Baiṭhak Caritra* (Indore: Vaiṣṇav Mitr Maṇḍal, 1995).

The dating of the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* is, however, more problematic. The authorship of the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* is attributed to Gokulnāth and Harirāy, but it seems that the texts were compiled and completed most probably by disciples of Harirāy. The stories of Ladabai, Dharabai, and Gangābāi in the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* all contain details concerning the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s exodus to Nathdvara and indicate that the revision of the text continued after the establishment of Nathdvara in Rajasthan in 1672. The *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* exists in its commentarial form in a manuscript bearing the date of 1730. This again would suggest that the *Do Sau Bāvan* was still in the process of being written and redacted towards the end of the seventeenth century.

The edition used here is Harirāy, *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, 3 vols. (Indore: Vaiṣṇav Mitr Maṇḍal, 1992.). For the *vārtā* of Laḍābāi and Dharābāi, see *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan*, vol. 3, *vārtā* 229, pp. 262-264. The *vārtā* of Gangābāi is found in *Do Sau Bāvan*, vol.1, *vārtā* 66, pp. 434-439.

For dating concerns, see Tanḍan's *Vārtā Sāhitya*, pp. 112-42. Also see See Gupta, *Aṣṭachāp aur Vallabha Sampradāy*, pp. 129-130. Dharendra Varma, *La Langue Braj* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1935), pp. 31-32, and Hawley, *Sūr Dās*, pp. 7-8.

³³ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthji ke Prakāṭya kī Vārtā* (Nāthdvāra: Vidyā Vibhāg, Mandir Maṇḍal, 1988).

The difficulties arising from working with such a literary corpus are obvious. These texts were written well after the deaths of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalnāth and are not reliable historical accounts. The historical value of many of the texts can be rejected because of the many miracle stories, historical anachronisms, and stories that serve the function of legitimating theological or political claims. Other stories, however, can be taken as at least being a small reflection of historical events that may have occurred in the community's past.³⁴ Thus references of repeated visits to certain geographical locations, references to certain historical events that can be verified by external non-sectarian sources, or small anecdotal details about Vallabha and his family which clearly serve no theological or legitimative purpose have been counted as having some value as historical evidence. The same can be said for the accounts of incidents that may actually prove to embarrass the community. The most fascinating aspect of the *vārtā* literature is its remarkable candor and its refusal to shy away from the inclusion of anything that can be potentially controversial. The texts tend to acknowledge that even the most exemplary devotees of Vallabha or Viṭṭhalnāth were individuals with moral failings, but it is left to the accompanying commentary to explain the moral lapses of devotees or *mahārājas*. Thus succession disputes, affairs, or uses of violence by *mahārājas* are openly discussed in the main text, but in the accompanying commentary are explained away as being

³⁴ Vasudha Dalmia has discussed some of the themes in the *vārtā* literature in Vasudha Dalmia, "Forging Community: The Guru in a Seventeenth Century Vaiṣṇava Hagiography," in *Charisma and Canon: Essays on the Religious History of the Indian Subcontinent*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar, Martin Christof (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 129-154. Also see her article, "The Establishment of the Sixth Gaddi of the Vallabha Sampradāy: Narrative Structure and the Use of Authority in a Vārtā of the Nineteenth Century," in *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature*, ed. Alan Entwistle and Françoise Mallison (Delhi: Manohar, 1994), pp. 94-117.

preordained by Vallabha or Viṭṭhalnāth or as the result of *karma* accumulated in a past life.

The later history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Rajasthan from the late seventeenth century onwards is a little easier to reconstruct. Court chronicles have proved to be useful in reconstructing the historical context for the political fortunes of Mewar, as have British administrative gazetteers which give information about estates, villages, and landholdings in the state by the end of the nineteenth century. Reconstructing the deterioration of relations between Nathdvāra and the Mewar royal court has been made considerably easier with the aid of the correspondence and files kept by British administrators during the nineteenth century. Other material which has been used are texts from the private collections of *mahārājas* which have been reprinted in books or articles written in Hindi. Thus the land grants and personal correspondence contained in the Kankaroli temple library may be inaccessible to the public, but have been reprinted in the footnotes and appendices of Śāstrī's *Kāṃkāroli kā Itihās*. Similar material held in private collections have been found published in what amounts to be the religious equivalent of coffee table books published to commemorate the memory of a deceased *mahārāja* or to celebrate the anniversary of an organization that has some links to the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.³⁵

³⁵ One such source that is used for this thesis is the memorial volume for Govindlāl Mahārāj who was the *mahārāja* of Nathdvāra until his death in 1994. See, Jaydev Gujargaud, ed. *Tilkavāt Gosvāmī Śrī 108 Govindalālji Mahārāja ko Samārpita Smṛti Granth* (Nāthdvāra: Nāthdvāra Mandir Maṇḍal, 1998). The other volume used is a special volume of essays published to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Nathdvāra Literary Society which publishes devotional literature about the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. See, Bhāgavati

Plan of Study

These sources along with secondary source material have been used to fashion what is a narrative history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The first chapter is meant to establish the motivations behind the religious policies of the Hindu and Muslim regimes of medieval North India and to outline how the religious policies of North India's Muslim rulers affected the relationship between Hindus and their Muslim counterparts. Thus having set the historical context for the medieval period, the second chapter will present the theological context needed for situating the *Puṣṭi Mārga* within the history of Vaiṣṇava devotional traditions and within the history of Braj, the pilgrimage area that was the center of *Puṣṭi Mārga* religious activity during the Mughal period.

The third chapter will finally focus specifically on the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* from the time of Vallabha until the end of the seventeenth century. This chapter will explore Vallabha's religious thought and then proceed to consider the possible motivation for Vallabha's travels and how these travels would come to form the basic structure for the patronage network of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. This chapter will then proceed to trace the continued expansion of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s patronage network under Vallabha's descendants and how this network came to include the Mughal administration. Finally, this chapter will focus on the settlement of the community in Braj, the tensions within the

Prasad Devapura, ed. *Sāhitya-Manḍal Nāthdvāra, Hīrak-Jayanti* (Nāthdvāra: Nāthdvāra Sāhitya Maṇḍal, 1996).

community over the control of wealth and sacred images, and the community's eventual departure for Rajasthan at the end of the seventeenth century.

Chapters four through six will deal with the relationship between the Kankaroli and Nathdvara houses of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and its patrons, the royal house of Mewar. Chapter four will first outline the context surrounding the establishment of British rule in Rajasthan and how this would contribute to political tensions in Mewar throughout the nineteenth century. Chapters five and six will deal specifically with how the Nathdvara and Kankaroli *mahārājas* were transformed into members of the Mewar aristocracy during the nineteenth century and how tensions between the Nathdvara house and its patrons would result in a growing rift between the two sides which would never be fully repaired.

Just as chapters four through six deal solely with the relationship between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and its royal patrons in Mewar, chapters seven through eight deal just with the relationship between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and its mercantile patrons in nineteenth century Bombay. Thus the seventh chapter focuses on the politics of the Bombay Presidency before moving on to the eighth chapter, which is devoted purely to the Maharaja Libel Case of 1862, which revolved around the alleged sexual misconduct of *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* living in Bombay. This chapter will explore the relationship between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and its mercantile devotees as revealed through the course of the trial, how the scandal would lead to the deterioration of relations between the *mahārājas* and their mercantile patrons, and how efforts to reform the *Puṣṭi Mārga* took an unfortunate twist

that would leave the relations between the *mahārājas* and their patrons severely strained by the early decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: The Practice of Religious Patronage in Medieval India

The history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* dates back to North India of the sixteenth century and the late seventeenth centuries. Thus the history of the community in North India took place against reigns of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire whose policies would have a profound effect on North India's political and religious landscape. The goal of this chapter, therefore, is threefold. The first goal is to establish the motivations behind the religious policies of the Hindu kingdoms that preceded the Muslim regimes of North India and to determine in what way these two regimes built upon and also departed from the policies of their Hindu predecessors. Establishing the lines of continuity and discontinuity will set the foundation for the second goal of this chapter, to determine how the religious policies of North India's Muslim rulers affected Hindus and their relationship with their Muslim counterparts. In doing so, the third goal of this chapter will be accomplished: to provide the historical context necessary to situate the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s activities in the pilgrimage area of Braj within the larger religious landscape of medieval North India and to determine the degree to which this community was affected by the changes in the religious policies that came with the decline of Hindu political rule and the rise of Muslim rule in the medieval period.

1.1 Religious Patronage and Political Authority in Medieval India

Between 500 and 1200 the subcontinent consisted of a number of regional kingdoms, which were the product of a process based upon territorial dominance and religious

patronage.¹ Regional dynasts had their beginnings as warriors, local chieftains, or small landowners, who would increase their spheres of influence through the acquisition of land and, over a period of a generation, would become high caste landowners, and eventually kings (*rājās*). Local kings, however, would compete against each other in a bid to expand their influence over a given geographical region. In the process, a regional king (*rāja*) could become a great king (*mahārāja*) and eventually a king of kings (*mahārājādhirāja*) by increasing the number of subordinate rulers (*samantas*) in his kingdom. Political boundaries were, therefore, extremely fluid in medieval India. Borders of kingdoms contracted and expanded as rulers assimilated local elites and absorbed other royal competitors into their larger territorial domains.

A ruler's sovereignty was legitimized in a royal installation ceremony (*rājyābhiṣekha*) conducted by priests (*brahmins*) in a temple. The ceremony involved the transference of divine power from the tutelary deity of the kingdom to the ruler, who then vivified his whole kingdom with his newly found divinity. In other words, just as the limbs of a ruler's body were rejuvenated with divine power, so too were his various subjects and lands infused with new life through the king's terrestrial immanence.² Thus the coronation ceremony transformed a king into a semi-divine being whose principal

¹ For details concerning the formation of polities in Medieval India, see Burton Stein, *A History of India* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 80-81, 96-98, 111-129.

² For a discussion of the *rājyābhiṣekha* ceremony see Ronald Inden, "Ritual Authority and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship," in *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, ed. John F. Richards (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1978), pp. 28-74.

duty (*rājadharmā*) was to look after the collective welfare of his subjects.³ The king was to protect his lands, uphold the caste (*varṇa*) system, and maintain the spiritual welfare of his subjects through the protection of temples and their brahminical custodians. Thus kings routinely endowed temples and granted land to *brahmins*. Endowments to temples financially ensured that these houses of worship could continue to perform rituals considered essential to the kingdom's welfare while land grants to *brahmins* were meant to be an acknowledgement of their role as the principal protectors of the kingdom's spiritual well being.

Brahmins, however, did not farm the land they had received as a gift. Land grants redistributed the shares of produce and taxes from certain villages to temple heads, musicians, dancing girls, and other individuals who provided the different services necessary for the performance of temple rituals. Such acts of largesse towards *brahmins* were not merely an expression of religious piety on the part of rulers. Transforming *brahmins* into members of a landed elite was a ritual means by which rulers asserted their superiority over other competing social groups and ensured popular support among their subjects.⁴ For example, the Gadhvala dynasty donated more than a hundred villages to five hundred *brahmins* in the pilgrimage city of Varanasi in 1093 to legitimize their dynastic claims to Varanasi. A similar strategy was also employed by the Chodagangas in the eastern state of Orissa. In order to win popular support for their regime, the

³ J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Social and Political Thought and Institutions" in *A Cultural History of India*, ed. A.L. Basham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 124-40. Also see Derrett's "Rajdharmā", *Journal of Asian Studies* 35 (1976), pp. 597-608 and Jan. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from an Indian Point of View* (Leiden: Brill, 1969).

⁴ Burton Stein, "The Politicized Temples of Southern India", in *The Sacred Center as the Focus of Political Interest*, ed. Hans Bakker (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1992), p. 166.

Chodagangas identified the tribal deity named Jagannāth as a manifestation of Viṣṇu and housed the image in a magnificent temple complex in the city of Puri. The Chodagangas then deemed themselves the earthly representatives of Jagannāth who was the kingdom's official ruler.⁵ The more generous the patronage, the more easily ambitious social groups could raise their social standing within their castes (*varṇas*) and sub-castes (*jātis*) at the expense of their competitors. It was in this way that the pastoral nomads became the ruling Rajputs of Rajasthan, herders become the Yadavas and Udaiyars of Western India, and hill chieftains transformed themselves into the ruling Hoysalas and Rashtrakutas of South India.⁶

1.1.1 Medieval Indian Temples as Cultural and Economic Centers

Varanasi and Jagannath Puri were just two of the many magnificent temple centers that emerged in medieval India. Other temple cities, like Kanauj, Madurai, Somnath, Srirangam, and Thanjavur, were also important centers of social and political mobility as well as major urban and cultural centers of great prestige that attracted both Hindus and non-Hindus alike. The result was the creation of cultural environments in which religious communities with contesting religious claims constantly overlapped with each other. In Western India, for example, Jain and Hindu communities flourished so much under the

⁵ Hermann Kulke, "Royal Temple Policy and the Structure of Medieval Hindu Kingdoms," in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, ed. Anncharlott Eschmann, Herman Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1986), pp. 133-134.

⁶ For summaries of the major ruling kingdoms in Medieval India, see Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (London: Croon Helm, 1986), pp. 109-124. Also see Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), pp. 219-334.

patronage of Hindu ruling families to the extent that intermarriage between the two communities became commonplace.

Buddhism, on the other hand, steadily spread in India from the sixth century onwards through Kashmir, Nepal, and down into Bengal only to be driven out of the subcontinent by supporters of brahminical Hinduism. Thus in Bengal, four hundred years of Buddhism under the Pala dynasty was displaced and replaced by Vaiṣṇavism which then flourished under the Sena dynasty. A similar phenomenon could be seen in South India where Buddhism and Jainism were displaced by the emergence of devotional (*bhakti*) communities dedicated to Viṣṇu and Śiva. The Pallavas of Madurai, for example, ordered the massacre of Jains at the behest of the Shaivite devotional community known as the Nayanars. Meanwhile, the great *bhakti* philosopher, Rāmānuja, was successful in displacing Jainism by converting the royal family of Karnataka known as the Hoysalas to his form of Vaishnavite devotion known as "Qualified Non-Dualism."

How is one to evaluate the importance of temple centers in medieval India? In order to understand what brought about the growth of temple centers, one needs to appreciate how regional state formation was intimately linked to the patronage of brahminical communities as means of legitimating territorial expansions. The results of these historical processes were royal cult centers which created political and economic linkages and were instrumental in forming religious identities across the subcontinent.⁷ As centers

⁷ For a discussion of the spatial dimensions of medieval Hindu polities see Brajdu Lal Chattopadhyaya, "Historiography, History, and Religious Centers: Early Medieval India, Circa Ad 700-1200," in *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India Ad 700-1200*, ed. Vishakha N. Desai and Darielle Mason (New York City: Asia Society Galleries, 1993), pp. 41-45. Also see David Sopher, "The Geographic Patterning of Culture" in David Sopher, *An Exploration of India* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 289-326. Sopher sees medieval Hindu polities as core zones connected together by a

for the creation of social identities in medieval India, temples were the complexes within which rulers were transformed into semi-divine beings, brahmins became wealthy landed elites, and social groups ritually asserted their superiority over each other. Even local deities were transformed as they became assimilated into Hindu mythological literature (*purāṇas*) and became the objects of state sponsored brahminical cults. In their capacities as centers of cultural growth, temples attracted both pilgrims and religious groups of considerable diversity competing for religious patronage. As centers of economic growth, temple cities were the centers of redistributive economies, which served to integrate various social groups whose livelihoods were dependent upon temple activity. As manifestations of political power, temple cities were the centers where local cults and temples were integrated into a larger political structure and became the sources of divine power that royal patrons drew upon in order to rule over their kingdoms.

1.2 The Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate

The network of temple cities that developed under the patronage of Hindu kings was broken apart in the tenth century. It was during this period that Central Asian warriors turned their eyes towards North India, marched through the trade routes of the Punjab, and slowly plundered the riches of the Gangetic plain. Between 997 and 1030, Mahmud of Ghazni sacked the pilgrimage centers of Mathura, Thaneshvar, Kannauj and Somnath. and was followed by Muhammad Ghuri who raided North India in 1192. It was Ghuri who paved the way for establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in North India. The Sultanate lasted from 1206 to 1506 under the leadership of five major dynasties – the Mamluks,

cultural flow of religious, trade, and military movements as well as by the migration of individuals from city to city.

Khaljis, Tughlaqs, Saiyyids, and the Lodis – and signaled the disappearance of medieval Hindu kingdoms and state patronage of brahminical learning in North India. The only two Hindu kingdoms that retained their independence and served as significant centers of brahminical learning were the South Indian kingdom of Vijaynagara and the Gajapati kingdom of Orissa.⁸

The establishment of the Sultanate brought a number of important changes in North Indian society of which the most obvious was administrative. Hindu kingdoms in North India were now replaced with an administrative structure that concentrated power in the hands of ruling sultans. Sultans ran their empires with the help of a chief minister (*vaḏir*) who oversaw revenue collection while other departments were created to oversee military affairs and the maintenance of state-provincial relations. The functions of the sultan and his ministers were replicated at the provincial level by governors and their officers who acted as revenue collectors, headmen, registrars, accountants, clerics, and judges.⁹

It was through these officials that the state maintained its control over the countryside and, most importantly, in the cities. The Turks and Afghans who came with the establishment of the Sultanate settled primarily in towns, thus giving rise to another important change in North India: a marked shift from a rural to an urban economy. It did not mean that villages were marginal to North Indian society. Villages remained an extremely integral part of the North Indian economy where craftsmen made ploughs,

⁸ For a history of the Delhi Sultanate, see Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁹ See Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 292-293.

yokes, carts, and produced luxury items such as velvet, silk, and satin which were produced for the consumption of urban dwellers and members of the royal court. It was not surprising, then, that artisans moved into cities looking for work thus transforming provincial capitals into prime centers of economic growth. The city of Surat in the western state of Gujarat, for example, was known for its bustling overseas trading in spices and silk while the city of Delhi owed its magnificence to the wealth of the city's mercantile community and the nobility who made up the royal court of the ruling sultans.¹⁰

The nobility made up one of the most important social groups in the Sultanate. Nobles earned their living through grants of landed income (*iqtas*) in return for their services to the court of which the most common was military service.¹¹ Thus the majority of the nobility consisted of commanders who derived their influence from their ability to wield military might. Not all nobles were military commanders; other members were the theologians, clerics, and jurists that made up the Muslim clergy (*ulema*). Rulers anxious to portray themselves as patrons of Islamic culture gave large tracts of land to the *ulema* to establish mosques and schools (*madrasā*) and patronage also took the form of assigning government postings to members of the *ulema* in departments relating to justice, education, and religious affairs. State patronage of Muslim scholars and jurists thus accomplished two objectives. Firstly, it ensured the political loyalty of an influential group in Muslim society and, secondly, it allowed the state to penetrate the affairs of the *ulema* and exert control over their decisions concerning religion. Thus religious

¹⁰ See Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1, pp. 294-295.

¹¹ For a discussion of the *iqta*, see Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, pp. 272-273.

patronage led to corruption. Governmental positions and land grants were obtained by bribery, and, in many instances, members of the *ulema* ceased to exert any independence as they increasingly became instruments of government policy.¹²

1.2.1 Patronage of Sufis During the Sultanate Period

Sultans also turned their attention towards the orders (*silsilā*) of Sufis who stressed the cultivation of one's inner spiritual life by traversing the path of Islamic law (*sharia*).¹³ Everything, according to Sufi masters, had an external and an internal meaning. If the dictates of the *sharia* represented the external form of Islam, it was Sufism which constituted the inner and more mystical dimension of Islam. Through such practices as fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage, and ritual prayer the individual would experience a wide variety of spiritual states ranging from states of contemplation and humility to states of awe and fear in the presence of God. These states (*hāl*) were considered to be spontaneous manifestations of God's presence within the individual and were to be distinguished from stations (*maqām*) or stages of spiritual growth such as poverty, asceticism, or patience which were all brought about by human action.

Sufis thus uttered simple prayers (*duā*) or made lengthy invocations (*dāvat*) to the Divine or, more commonly, engaged in the constant repetition (*dhikr*) of God's name. The remembrance of God's name was then further emphasized by the practice of *sama* or

¹² Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "Wajh-I-Ma'ash Grants under the Afghan Kings (1451-1555)," in *Medieval India - A Miscellany*, ed. K.A Nizami (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1972), pp. 26-27.

¹³ The following discussion of Sufism is based on Carl Ernst's excellent discussion of Sufi doctrine in *The Eternal Garden* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 5-17.

the inducement of a state of spiritual ecstasy (*wajd*) through the recitation of mystical poetry set to music. All of these practices ultimately culminated in the state of sainthood (*valīya*), a state of spiritual perfection that allowed one access to divine knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and revelation (*kashf*) and to experience a unity with the Divine. This stage was to be followed by the final goal of Sufi practice: the complete absorption (*fana*) of the individual into God.

The austerities of Sufi masters (*shaykhs*) residing in their hospices (*khānqāhs*) attracted a broad section of the population who saw the shaykh not only as an important figure of religious instruction, but also as a miracle worker whose blessings were to be sought in times of difficulties. This type of charisma extended well beyond the shaykh's death. The divine power of the deceased shaykh was said to remain within his tomb (*dargāh*) and was transferred to his descendants who continued the practice of spiritual instruction.¹⁴ Thus it was not uncommon to see sultans giving tax-free lands (*Wajh-I-Ma'ash*) to Sufis. Certain acres of land in villages were alienated from the government to a *silsilā* so Sufis could pray undisturbed for the well being of the Sultanate.¹⁵ Thus the patronage of Sufis became intimately linked to the process of state building during the Sultanate period. Sultans used religious patronage to maintain the popular support of their subjects by sponsoring religious communities whose function was to protect the well-being of the state.

¹⁴ For a discussion of Chishtī shrines in India see Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "The Early Chishtī Dargahs," in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History, and Significance*, ed. Christian Troll (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 1-23.

¹⁵ For a short discussion of the general policy concerning the dispensation of land grants, see Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "Wajh-I-Ma'ash Grants," pp. 19-44. Also see Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, p. 49.

The patronage of Sufis by the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate made Sufi orders powerful enough to determine the political fortunes of a ruling sultan. This was certainly the case with the Chishtī order of Sufis founded in the West Indian city of Ajmer by the famous twelfth century saint Muʿin al-Dīn Chishtī (1142-1234). Unlike other Sufi orders in the subcontinent, the Chishtīs did not have to look towards Central Asia and the Middle East as their spiritual homes since their major shrines were located within the subcontinent. This in turn allowed the Chishtīs to make the unique claim that their order was both Indian and Muslim.¹⁶ It was not surprising, then, that the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate looked towards the Chishtīs for political legitimacy. An alliance with the Chishtīs would serve to buttress a sultan's claim that he was a genuine Indo-Muslim ruler and not a mere foreigner.

Thus the influence of the Chishtī order expanded with time until it enjoyed great popularity in Delhi under the reign of the Tughluqs. The principal and widely read poets of the Tughluq regime, Amīr Ḥaṣan and Amīr Khusraw, were all disciples of the renowned Chishtī shaykh, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (d. 1325), as were the Tughluq's leading historians Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī and 'Isāmī. The chronicles and poetry written by these literary elites about Nizām al-Dīn helped to popularize the reputation of the

¹⁶ Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 84.

Chishtīs to the point that the dynastic fortune of the Sultanate was associated with the pre-eminence of the Chishtī order by the public and ruling classes alike.¹⁷ Thus the rise and fall of the Tughluqs were unanimously attributed to the treatment accorded by sultans to Sufi shaykhs. According to the historian, ‘Isāmī, Delhi survived foreign attacks because the sultan, Muhammad bin Tughluq (r. 1324-51), had paid his respects to the tomb (*dargāh*) of Moinuddin Chishtī. ‘Isāmī also asserted that it was the death of Nizām al-Dīn that led to the decline of Delhi and to the eventual crumbling of the Tughluq dynasty as provinces sought to establish kingdoms that would be independent of Delhi.¹⁸

The relationship between the Chishtīs and the Delhi Sultans at times was rather tense.¹⁹ The Chishtīs strenuously objected to the imposition of state authority upon their hospices for it was considered a challenge to the spiritual authority of their shaykhs. Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ resisted all attempts on the part of sultans to meet with him insisting that Sufis should maintain their independence from royal authorities so that they might continue to pray for the benefit of the Muslim people. This, however, did not stop certain sultans from trying to curb the Nizām al-Dīn’s influence in Delhi. Sultan Qutb al-dīn Mubārak (r. 1316-1320) publicly threatened Nizām al-Dīn and attempted to lure a shaykh from the Suharawardī order of Sufis into Delhi to establish a rival order. The

¹⁷ Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaykh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India," in Marc Gaborieau, ed. *Islam et société en Asie Du Sud* (Paris:Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1986), pp. 69-70.

¹⁸ Richard Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States" in *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 102-103.

¹⁹ For a discussion of Sufi-Sultan relations see, Simon Digby, "The sufi *shaykh* and the sultan: a conflict of claims to authority in medieval India," in *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 28 (1990), pp. 71-81. Also see Aziz. Ahmad, "The Sufi and the Sultan in Pre-Mughal India," *Der Islam* 38 (1962), pp. 142-153.

tension between Sufis and sultan continued after Qutb's death when Ghiyās al-dīn Tughluq (r.1320-1325), Qutb's successor, contemplated punitive action against Nizām al-dīn for accepting charitable donations from his rival, Khusraw Khān. The tension between the Chishtis and the Delhi sultans continued even after Nizām al-Din passed on and was succeeded by Nāṣir al-Dīn Chirāgh-I-Dihlī (1276-1356). The Chishtis were punished repeatedly by Muhammad bin Tughluq because they objected to attempts made by the state to recruit Sufis into government service. Thus when political calamities befell Delhi in the fourteenth century, both historians and the local populace attributed the events to Tughluq's disrespectful treatment of Nāṣir al-Dīn.

1.2.2 Patronage of Hindus During the Sultanate Period

The support that sultans made for the upkeep of Islam did not by any means preclude support for non-Muslims. Hindus were recruited into the service of the court as artisans, laborers, clerks, and even in the military where they made up a large part of the elite infantry guards who protected the sultan. Hindus of the *khatiri* caste arose to prominence in Delhi and the Punjab as accountants and financial officers and became so influential that, by the time of the Lodi dynasty, they occupied all revenue posts at both the imperial and provincial levels. One sees a similar trend among the mercantile community, which was centered in the western port city of Cambay. It was Hindus and Jains who made up the majority of the merchants whose overseas trading was largely responsible for the prosperity of the Delhi Sultanate.²⁰ In short, Hindus were indispensable in the

²⁰ Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "Social Mobility in the Delhi Sultanate," in *Medieval India 1: Researches in the History of India 1200-1580*, ed. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 39-42.

administration of the Delhi Sultanate and those who entered into government service came to live lives of great affluence.²¹

It was the vital role that Hindus played in the administration of the Sultanate that helps to explain why sultans ignored Islamic law when it came to dealing with the Hindu populace. According to Islamic law, only monotheistic non-Muslims were to be accorded protected status (*dhimmī*) on the condition that they pay an annual poll tax (*jizyā*) and that they refrain from both proselytisation and the construction of new shrines.²² Hindus, however, were given considerable latitude. They were widely recognized among the ruling nobility as having *dhimmī* status and both sultans and governors were behind the reconstruction of temples destroyed during times of war. For example, it was Allaudin Khilji (r.1296-1301) who was responsible for the reconstruction of temples in Gujarat, and, in 1326, it was the Muslim governor, Ahmed Jajneri, who allowed Hindus to rebuild temples and encouraged them to continue with their practice of Shaivite devotions.²³ In a similar vein, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq was known to have gone out of his way to recruit Hindus into his administration and even went as far to

²¹ Baranī writes the following about Hindus under the Sultanate's regime:

"...These infidels are honoured, distinguished, favoured and made eminent... Muslim kings not only allow but are pleased with the fact that infidels, polytheists, idol-worshippers, and cow-dung (*sargin*) worshippers, build houses like palaces, wear clothes of brocade and ride Arab horses... They take Musalmans into their service; the poor Musalmans beg of them at their doors; and in the capital of Islam, owing to which the edifice of Islam is elevated, they are called *rais* (great rulers), *ranas* (minor rulers), *thakurs* (warriors), *sahas* (bankers), *mehtas* (clerks), and *pandits* (priests)." This description is found in a political manual written by Baranī called *Fatawa-I-Jahandari*. The edition referred to here is Ziauddin Barani, *The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate (Including a Translation of Ziauddin Barani's Fatawa-I-Jahandari)*, trans. Mohammad and Afsar Umar Salim Khan Habib (Delhi: Kitab Mahal, 1972). This quote can be found on p. 48. For Baranī's description of Hindu businessmen, see pp. 35-36.

²² For a thorough discussion of the *jizyā* see Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 281-287.

²³ Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 287-288.

publicly rub shoulders with Hindu ascetics and astrologers. For Muhammad, such measures made good political sense. He needed to counterbalance the growing influence of Muslim nobles at court by absorbing members of the Hindu majority into his administrative system.²⁴

1.2.3 Monotheistic Devotional Communities

Those who had benefited the most from the administrative patronage of the Delhi Sultanate were neither members of the Hindu royal classes nor *brahmins*. The members of the Hindu royalty who survived the invasions of Islamic rulers retreated into the countryside which in turn led to a noticeable decline in the influence of the brahminical community who were now without state patronage.²⁵ A few *brahmins* found favor with the Muslim nobility for their knowledge of astrology, but the main source of patronage for *brahmins* now came from everyday Hindus. *Brahmins* continued to act as family priests, they presided over various life rites, they maintained temples, taught in schools, and scrupulously maintained their purity by maintaining a good, safe distance from their Muslim counterparts. The shape of the traditional four-fold division of the Hindu caste system was thus altered. Neither *brahmins* or members of the warrior (*kshatriya*) class held the same influence in North Indian society thus causing a void of religious leadership in urban areas. This void was to be filled by members of the *vaishya* community and members of low-caste artisan groups such as weavers, blacksmiths, and

²⁴ Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*, p. 294.

²⁵ See the introduction to Savitri Chandra Shobha's *Social Life and Concepts in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry* (Delhi: Chandrayan Publications, 1983) and J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 19-20.

pottery, who articulated a religious vision that would depart significantly from the temple rituals and the observation of ritual and caste regulations practiced by upper-caste *brahmins*.²⁶

These new religious figures on the North Indian religious landscape were known as Sants. Sants rejected the traditional Hindu practice of worshipping gods and goddesses in favor of a spiritual quest to seek union with a God devoid of human attributes.²⁷ The earliest members of the Sant tradition, who lived during the fourteenth and fifteenth century, drew their membership from tailors, cobblers, barbers, minor landowners and other social groups who stood below *brahmins* and warriors in the caste system.²⁸ Of these individuals, the most prominent was Kabir (1440-1518), a Sant who hailed from a group of weavers who converted from Hinduism to Islam.²⁹ In the century and a half following Kabir, one of the two most prominent individuals of the Sant tradition was the Punjabi accountant, Nānak (1469-1539), whose caste known as the *khatris* rose to social prominence during the Sultanate period. The other prominent Sant was the cotton-carder, Dādū Dayāl (1544-1603), who lived in the western state of Rajasthan. It was under

²⁶ J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, pp. 21-23.

²⁷ For an introduction of the Sants, see Charlotte Vaudeville, "Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path of Sanctity," in *The Sants Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, ed. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Delhi: Motilal Banarasisdass, 1987), pp. 21-40.

²⁸ For a useful but small summary of the social background of some Sants see David Lorenzen, "The Lives of Nirguni Saints," in *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community and Identity and Political Action*, ed. David Lorenzen (Albany: State of University New York Press, 1995), pp. 186-187. For translations of early Sant poets, see Nirmal Dass, *Songs of the Saints from the Adi Granth*. (Albany: State University Press of New York, 2000).

²⁹ For an introduction to the life of Kabir, see Charlotte Vaudeville, trans. *A Weaver Named Kabir: Selected Verses with a Detailed Biographical and Historical Introduction* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 39-107.

Kabir, Nānak, and Dādū that the Sant tradition experienced its most creative phase and would come to influence individuals such as Malūkdās (1573-1671), Prananāth (1617-1693), and Jagjīvandās (1669-1760) who would carry on the message of the Sant tradition well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The message of the Sants was one of protest and dissent against the prevailing social conditions of their time. Kabīr rejected the wealthy of North Indian society as full of avarice and then went on to extend his attacks to the traditional practices of Hindus and Muslims alike. For Kabīr, Hindu priests and Muslim clerics were both greedy hypocrites engaging in meaningless religious rituals that had no spiritual value. Thus, in poem after poem, Kabīr mercilessly satirized and attacked what he believed was the hypocrisy of clerics, the emptiness of brahminical learning, and the futility of worshipping gods and goddesses.³⁰ This rejection of North Indian society was also echoed by Nānak who viewed the bloodshed that accompanied the battles carried out by the Lodī Dynasty as indicative of how such traditional Hindu practices as renunciation, image worship, pilgrimages, and ritual observances were all rendered useless in his time. The result, according to Nānak, was an age of irreligion.³¹

Dādū, too, would come to voice the same concerns as his predecessors. Dādū rejected the inequality of the caste system and lamented that Hindu and Muslim

³⁰ For translation of Kabir's poetry, see Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir*, pp. 131-314. For the translation of the collection of Kabir's poetry known as *The Bijak* see Kabir, *The Bijak*, trans. Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983). For a small translation of Kabir's poetry, see John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 50-61.

³¹ Gopal Singh, trans., *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, 4 vols. (New York: Taplinger, 1962), p. 692.

communities only served to cause strife and prevented both faiths from realizing that they emanated from the same formless Creator of the universe. In making this statement about the spiritual equality of Hindus and Muslims, Dadu, like Nānak and Kabīr, did not seek to create a syncretic cult that brought Hindus and Muslims together.³² All three individuals instead sought to articulate a new religious vision that would go beyond the established religious traditions of Hinduism and Islam by bypassing the authority of priests and clerics that acted as the mediators between the individual and God. All three Sants advocated something much more simple: the direct realization of an attributeless Divine through the constant remembrance and repetition of its name.

1.2.4 Interaction Between Sufis, Sants, and Nath Yogis in the Medieval Period

The religious vision articulated in the Sant tradition was shaped by a number of influences. In the religious thought of the Sants, one can find traces of Buddhist practice, esoteric Hindu *yoga* systems, and finally Sufism, of which they had some knowledge. These contacts with Sufis might help to explain some of the parallels one can find between Sufi literature and the devotional poetry of the Sants.³³ The Sufi and the Sants both rejected the ritualism associated with religious orthodoxy and, instead, sought to realize an intense, interior experience of an ineffable Divine Being through the cultivation of passionate love for God. For both the Sants and the Sufis, this passionate

³² See W.G. Orr, *A Sixteenth Century Indian Mystic* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), pp. 127-184.

³³ See Bruce Lawrence, "The Sant Movement and North Indian Sufis" in Schomer and McLeod, eds, *The Sants*, pp. 359-374.

relationship between the Divine and the individual manifested itself through the pain and suffering that came in being separated from the Divine Beloved. Thus in Sufi and Sant devotional works, one sees the passionate love for God being articulated through the feelings of pain, agony, grief, and the blazing fire of love. It is this suffering, according to both Sants and Sufis, which is a necessary part of the religious path, for without it, one cannot understand the true meaning of love.

Given the lack of extensive historical evidence, it is difficult to discern exactly to what degree Sufis and Sants influenced each other. There is, however, much more historical evidence when it comes to tracing the interaction between Sufis and Hindu ascetics who made up what was known as the Nāth community. The Nāths sought to achieve, through the practice of *haṭha yoga*, a union with a formless Absolute known as “the Incomparable one” (*alakh*) and “the eternal one” (*nirañjan*).³⁴ Nāths believed that there was a series of six channels within the body through which flowed the life-giving energy. The challenge for Nāth adepts was to find a means of channeling this energy into realizing their unity with the Divine. Nāths thus continually repeated sacred syllables (*mantras*), they engaged in the practice of breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), they practiced the use of various postures (*āsanas*) and they practised hand gestures (*mudrās*). All of these practices were meant to channel the body’s life-energy from the base of the body upwards to the crown of the head where divine union and bliss were said to be experienced. Accompanying this state of spiritual realization (*samādhi*) was the manifestation of the “unstruck sound” (*anāhata śabda*) which referred to the manifestation of the Divine within the body in the form of

sound. This mystical sound was believed to result from the continual chanting of *mantras* and was always said to accompany the state of bliss that resulted from the channeling of divine energy by the aspirant.

The similarities between Sufism and certain aspects of Hindu teaching were not lost upon some scholars in North India. The brilliant scholar of the Ghaznavid period, Al-Birunī (978-1048), used his extensive knowledge of Sanskrit to read Hindu scriptures such as the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali and incorporated this knowledge into his famous history of India named *Kitab al-Hind*.³⁵ In his book, Al-Birunī wrote that Hindus subscribed to a philosophy of non-dualism that stressed the essential unity between God and the human souls who were ignorant of their divine identity. Al-Birunī continued his exposition of Hindu teachings by also noting the emphasis placed on the spiritual aspirant to develop a single-minded pursuit to realize God which would culminate in the individual's ability to transcend all human wants and desires. Al-Birunī, however, did not see the non-dualism of Hindu scriptures as being anything new. The goal of Sufi teachings, according to Al-Birunī, was to awaken the individual's dormant soul to the presence of the Divine. This was accomplished by pursuing a path of asceticism that would cultivate an obsessive desire for God.

Impressed by the ascetic tendencies of the Nāths, certain Sufi scholars also turned their eyes towards their Hindu counterparts and began to study the Nāth practices of self-

³⁴ For a dense overview of Nath practices, see David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 218-262.

³⁵ Al-Biruni, *Alberuni's India; an Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A. D. 1030*, trans. E. Sachau (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990), pp. 68-70.

mortification. This led Sufis to read and translate *haṭha yoga* texts such as the influential Sanskrit text, *Amṛta Kuṇḍa*, which emphasized the practice of breath control and the control of bodily functions. A thirteenth century Muslim convert to the Nāth community named Qāzi Ruknu'd-Dīn Samarqand translated the text into Arabic and would be followed by the sixteenth century scholar, Shaykh Muhammad Ghaws who translated the *Amṛta Kuṇḍa* into Persian.³⁶ It was the *Amṛta Kuṇḍa* which, in turn, came to exert a tremendous influence on the sixteenth century Chishtī *shaykh* Abd Al-Quddus Gangohi (1456-1537 C.E) who was inspired by both the *Amṛta-Kuṇḍa* and his meetings with Nath *jogīs* to write the *Rushd-Nāma*, a spiritual manual written in Persian and Hindi that drew parallels between Sufi practice and the practice of Nāth ascetics.³⁷ Gangohi equated the Nāth practice of repeating *mantras* with the Sufi practice of *dhikr*. The Nāth practice of breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) was equated with a similar Sufi practice known as *pasi-I-anja*, and Gangohi used Nāth designations for God like *Alakh* and *Nirañjan* to describe the Absolute with whom he and other Sufis sought union. It was on the basis of these parallels that Gangohi designated a rigorous spiritual discipline for his devotees that emphasized the constant practice of *dhikr* and self-mortification in order to induce a spiritual state where one's sensitivities were heightened to the presence of God (*Sultan-i-Zikr*). This stage was considered by Gangohi to be the preliminary stage that needed to be reached before one could welcome God's presence and become fully absorbed in his being (*fana' al-fana*).

³⁶ S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manohoralal, 1978), p. 335.

Gangohi's incorporation of Sufi texts was taken one step further by the Sufi Mir 'Abdul-Wahid Bilgrami. Bilgrami compiled a Persian dictionary of Hindi devotional songs to Kṛṣṇa and justified their use to orthodox Sufis in Sufi musical gatherings by arguing that the legends surrounding Kṛṣṇa's relationship with his parents and the milkmaids (*gopīs*) of his village were merely symbolic means of representing key concepts in Sufi spirituality.³⁷ Kṛṣṇa was actually the Prophet Muhammad, the milkmaids were angels, Kṛṣṇa's mother represented the divine mercy of God while the cluster of sacred towns associated with Kṛṣṇa's birth and earthly activities all represented specific spiritual states experienced by Sufis during the course of their practices. Thus the city of Mathura represented the world of humanity in which all living beings live, Kṛṣṇa's childhood village of Gokul represented the realm of divine omnipotence, while the city of Dvarka where Kṛṣṇa passed his adulthood represented the final result of Sufi practice: complete absorption into the Divine. In other words, according to Bilgrāmi, the Kṛṣṇa legends represented the various stages of Sufi spiritual development beginning with the individual's life in the material world and ending with his complete absorption in a state of ecstasy.

The use of Kṛṣṇaite themes to explain Sufi thought was one aspect of a broader trend in medieval Indian society to popularize Sufism by reinterpreting popular Indian folk romances within the framework of Sufi thought. This genre of poetry was created by the fourteenth century poet, Maulana Dāu'd. Dāu'd wrote the *Cāndāyan*, whose mystical

³⁷ Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. 2, pp. 336-342.

³⁸ Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. 2, pp. 359-362.

retelling of the romance between the princess Cāndā and the cowherd Lorik reflected the complex interaction that occurred in North India between Sanskrit, Persian, and regional literary and aesthetic traditions. Dāu'd borrowed from Persian literary traditions the practice of establishing an elaborate theoretical prologue that sought to frame his story within the metaphysics of Sufi religiosity. He then drew upon distinctly Indian literary genres to express his story. Indian folk poetry describing the twelve month separation (*bārahamāsā*) of a lover from her beloved was used as the model to recount the sections of the *Cāndāyan* that described the separation between Lorik and Cāndā³⁹

Dāu'd also drew upon the important eighth century Sanskrit dramaturgical text known as the *Nāṭyāśāstra*, using ideas from it to convey to his audience of connoisseurs (*rasikas*) the essential aesthetic mood (*rasa*) of his poem. Dāu'd thus used the *Nāṭyāśāstra*'s complex categorization of emotions that could be experienced by heroes and heroines of literary texts in order to link the pleasure of listening to the love-story of Cāndā and Lorik to the ideal relationship between the individual and God.⁴⁰ Thus the meeting of Cāndā and Lorik describes the emotional intensity with which the soul unites with God; the pain Lorik feels when separated from Cāndā is meant to describe the pain of love experienced in separation from the Divine; and their final union at the conclusion of the romance results in *prema-rasa* or the consummation of a mutually fulfilling love between the soul and God. Dāu'd's skill in interweaving Persian and Sanskrit literary

³⁹ See the introduction to Manjhan, *Madhumālāti: An Indian Romance*. trans. Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. xv.

⁴⁰ See Manjhan, *Madhumālāti*, pgs xv-xvi.

genres proved to be extremely influential and served as a model or formula for an entire regional tradition of Indian Sufi poetry written in vernacular Hindi. After the *Cāndāyan*, came Qutban's *Mrgāvafī* (1503), Malik Muhammad Jāyasī's famous *Padmāvātī* (1540), and Manjhan's *Madhumālātī* (1545).

1.2.5 The Limits of Sufi Tolerance

The interaction between Sufis and Hindus not only generated a rich body of literary and theological treatises, but it also came to generate a type of friendly, competitive spirituality in which both groups sought to assert the superiority of their religions over the other. One finds, for example, in Sufi literature surrounding Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', stories of Nāth adepts trying to impress the Chishtī saint with feats of magic.⁴¹ It is not surprising, however, that in these Sufi texts the Nāths are eventually humbled by Nizām al-Dīn thus emphasizing the superiority of Sufism over Nāth practices. Similar stories underlining the superiority of Sufi spirituality over Hinduism can be found in texts that deal with the life of the great Sufi saint, Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī, who resided in the city of Ajmer. One story details how Moinuddin made the stone image of a Hindu god talk thus prompting a Hindu magician to engage in a competition with Mu'in al-Dīn over who possessed the more superior magical powers. Mu'in al-Dīn, of course, wins and thus succeeds in converting the magician and a whole host of other Hindus to Islam.

⁴¹ S.A.A. Rizvi, "Sufis and Natha Yogis in Medieval Northern India (12th to the 16th Centuries)," *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 7 (1970), pp. 125-127.

This theme of proselytization is taken up yet again in another story revolving around Mu'in al-Dīn that describes how the efforts of the local ruler of Ajmer to oust

Mu'in al-Dīn led to the city's near destruction by Mahmud of Ghazni. The result was the beginning of the spread of Islam throughout North India, a task that would be carried out by future Chishtī saints.⁴² Thus one finds narratives of other Chishtī saints that are modeled on the Mu'in al-Dīn narratives. This was certainly the case with the Chishtī Sufi, Sayyid Ashraf whose narratives concerning the defeat of Hindu ascetics through the use of occult powers seems to be a replication of much earlier narratives concerning the legendary feats of Mu'in al-Dīn.⁴³

Stories, however, were not only limited to narratives dealing with miracle working Sufis. In Bengal, oral traditions abounded that explained the conversion of Bengalis to Islam by creating fictitious accounts of saints proselitizing in the Bengal region. For example, two famous Bengali Sufis, Jalāl-al-dīn Tabrizi and Nur Qutb-I-alam Pandawi, were said to have carried out mass conversions of Hindus despite the lack of historical evidence to suggest that they had ever engaged in such activities. Stories were created and were continually enlarged with more details in order to legitimize the presence of Islam in Bengal and assert its religious superiority over Hinduism.⁴⁴ Other stories, however, went one step further by glorifying the activities of Sufis as a heroic struggle to convert stubborn Hindus to Islam. Thus one sees evidence of martyr narratives

⁴² Muzzafar Alam, "Competition and Co-existence: Indo-Islamic Interaction" in *Itinerario* 13 (1989), pp. 41-42.

⁴³ Bruce Lawrence, "Early Indo-Muslim Saints and Conversion" in Yohanan Friedmann ed. *Islam in Asia*, vol.1, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), p. 119.

⁴⁴ Lawrence, "Early Indo-Muslim Saints and Conversion," pp. 123-124.

surrounding tombs of Sufi saints who died while bravely seeking to spread their faith. One such example was Ghazi Miyan who was lionized in narratives as supposedly carrying out *jihads* against Hindus in North India.⁴⁵ One finds a similar example in Bengal, where the Shaykh Jalāl Suharwardī was the object of similar narratives that detailed his alleged conversion of thousands of Hindus in eastern Bengal by defeating the ruler of the town of Sylhet.⁴⁶

Other Sufis, however, sought to assert their claims of superiority by appealing directly to ruling political authorities. In his letters to the emperor Sikander Lodi (r.1517-1526), Shaykh Abd Al-Quddus Gangohi expressed his feeling that the state was threatening the existence of Sufis and the *ulema* by revoking tax-free land grants. He emphasized to Sikandar that the duty of rulers was to create a true Islamic polity by supporting Sufis as well as the poor and the weak members of society. Sufis, Gangohi argued, possessed a direct knowledge of divine wisdom, which they were to use for the good of humanity and thus they warranted state protection so that they could continue to pursue, without any worldly concern, their prayers for the benefit of humanity.⁴⁷ It is this theme which was reiterated in Gangohi's letter to Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire. The role of the Muslim ruler, said Gangohi, was to honor and uphold the dignity of the Muslim religious classes by exempting them from taxation and creating a pure Islamic polity that only gave Muslims high administrative positions within the ruling

⁴⁵ Muzzafar Alam, "Competition and Co-existence," p. 43.

⁴⁶ Muzzafar Alam, "Competition and Co-existence," pp. 43-44.

⁴⁷ Simon Digby, "Abd-ul Quddus Gangohi: The Personality and Attitudes of a Medieval Sufi" in *Medieval India: A Miscellany*, vol. 3 (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1975), p. 32.

government. Non-Muslims were to pay special discriminatory taxes, they were to be prevented from wielding any power within the administrative system, and they were not to carry out any of their religious observances in public.⁴⁸

Gangohi's views were echoed by Ziyā' alDīn Baranī, the leading historian of the Delhi Sultanate and disciple of the Chishtī shaykh Nizām alDīn Awliyā'. Baranī felt threatened by the possibility of Hindus occupying prominent administrative posts within the Sultanate and thus wrote a political manual that sought to remind sultans that they were the "shadow of God", whose sole purpose was to carry out the will of God as outlined in the *Qu'rān*.⁴⁹ The office of the sultan, therefore, gave the occupant the authority to safeguard Islamic revelation and to protect the supremacy of Islamic law through whatever means necessary on the condition that the ruling sultan did not use his position as an instrument for exerting his personal power. The sultan's power was to be used only in the service of divine dispensation and thus the authority of a sultan was dependent on his willingness to carry out the tenets of Islam.⁵⁰ Thus Baranī expected that as the guardians of the Islamic faith, sultans would eradicate polytheism in order to ensure the establishment of Islam at the center of life in the Delhi Sultanate. He insisted that in order to protect the subcontinent's Muslim minority, Hindus could not be allowed to practice their worship of gods for it would give rise to immoral practices that ranged from drinking to prostitution.⁵¹ If it were impossible, Baranī continued, to remove

⁴⁸ Digby, "Abd-ul Quddus Gangohi," p. 33.

⁴⁹ See Baranī, *Fatawa-I-Jahandari*, p. 86.

⁵⁰ Baranī, *Fatawa-I-Jahandari*, pp. 87-88.

⁵¹ Baranī, *Fatawa-I-Jahandari*, p. 48.

polytheism, then it was incumbent upon the ruler to dishonor and disgrace Hindus. Thus Baranī recommended that Hindus should at all costs be barred from living lives of luxury and affluence and should be forced to choose between either converting to Islam or being put to death⁵²

1.2.6 Evaluating the Religious Landscape of the Sultanate Period

The supremacy of Islam envisioned by Gangohi and Baranī never came to pass in the Sultanate. Although the patronage of Sufis and *ulema* established the Delhi Sultans as patrons and protectors of the Islamic faith, there is nothing to suggest that rulers ever engaged in a type of religious imperialism that envisioned the supremacy of Islam throughout North India. On the contrary, rulers adopted a flexible approach to governance that linked the process of religious patronage to the task of state-building in North India. The patronage of Sufi orders was an important means of legitimizing the regime of a sultan and as long as orders remained politically co-operative with ruling sultans, the more likely they were to receive generous financial endowments. If orders were perceived as political threats, however, they were liable to suffer some form of political action from the state.

The patronage of Hindus during the Sultanate was based on a similar pattern. The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in North India was accompanied by the elimination of Hindu kingdoms and the major temple cities of North India, but the absence of Hindu kingdoms in North India later allowed for a certain flexibility in the later patronage of

⁵² Baranī, *Fatawa-I-Jahandari*, pp.46-47.

Hindu subjects. The lack of any clear political center around which Hindus could rally made it easier for sultans to absorb them into the larger framework of the Sultanate. This was accomplished by engaging in a form of patronage that was structured around both the ethnic and religious politics of the time and the need to maintain the administrative structure of the Sultanate.⁵³ It thus made no sense for the state to endorse a policy that advocated the conversion of Hindus. The complexities of North Indian society simply made it impossible to apply a rigid approach to governance that advocated the oppression of the majority of the sultan's subjects.

These subjects over whom sultans ruled came from differing religious communities that were brought into existence by a complex set of political, economic, and social circumstances. State patronage of *brahmins* was now replaced by the patronage of Sufis and Muslim clerics, who in turn interacted with other religious communities that came to the forefront of North Indian society due to the decline of state sponsored brahminical patronage and to the process of urbanization. The result of these two processes was the emergence of the Sant tradition which drew its membership from mercantile and artisan communities and articulated a vision of religiosity that was directed against orthodox Islam and Sanskrit-based Hinduism. The rulers of the Sultanate thus presided over a bevy of communities that interacted with each other and articulated their contesting religious views in meetings, in poetry, and in religious texts. The religious landscape of the Delhi Sultanate certainly was not dull. Quite to the contrary, the religious scene during the Sultanate period was quite a lively one that would undergo some major transformations with the establishment of the Mughal Empire.

⁵³ Ernst, *The Eternal Garden*, p. 51.

1.3 The Consolidation of the Mughal Empire in North India

The Sultanate slowly disintegrated at the end of the Tughluq dynasty into a series of regional kingdoms throughout North and Western India. Some were established on the extremities of North India in Gujarat, Kashmir, and Bengal while another sultanate was established to the east of Gujarat in Malwa, the strategic area between Gujarat and the Gangetic plain through which traders passed in caravans in order to trade their wares in North India. Thus by the time the Lodi dynasty was established, its rulers were left to rule over a truncated Delhi Sultanate that now encompassed the Gangetic Plain extending from the Punjab into Bihar. There was a relative amount of stability under the rulership of Sikander Lodi, but upon his death in 1517, North India was plunged into a state of war. Warring factions in the court fought for control of the royal throne and although Sikandar's son, Ibrāhīm (r. 1517-1526), managed to win power, he went on a vendetta to punish those nobles who had challenged him for the rulership of the Sultanate. For a three-year period, Ibrāhīm waged a ruthless war on the nobles who opposed him and left in his wake an enormous amount of carnage throughout Northern and Western India that even shocked contemporary chroniclers of the time.⁵⁴ The Sultanate would become so weakened that it would lead in 1526, to the ascendancy of the Mughal reign in North India

⁵⁴ See Kishori Saran Lal, *Twilight of the Sultanate: A Political and Social Cultural History of the Sultanate of Delhi From the Invasion of Timur to the Conquest of Babur 1398-1526* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 198-216.

1.3.1 The Consolidation of Mughal Power

The establishment of the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century marked a momentous, but politically unstable period in the history of North India.⁵⁵ Its founder, Babur (r. 1526-1530), built his empire upon the ruins of the Lodi Dynasty, but the fight for control of North India between Babur's son, Humayun, and the Afghan ruler Sher Shah (r. 1538-1545) resulted in more warfare in North India which was continued by Humayun's son Akbar (r. 1555-1605). During his reign, Akbar took over the fortress cities of Agra, Delhi, Lahore, and Jaunpur, conquered the Hindu Rajput kingdoms in Rajasthan, and occupied the Punjab, Gujarat, and Bengal as well. Thus when his fifty-year reign as emperor ended, Akbar left his successors a sprawling empire that stretched from Kabul across Kashmir, from the Punjab to Gujarat, and from Bengal to Assam. Jahangir, whose reign was marked by two rebellions led by his sons, succeeded Akbar in 1605. The first rebellion, carried out by the Prince Khusraw, was defeated and was followed later by another rebellion by his second son, Khurram in 1622. Khurram was defeated, exiled to the Deccan, and returned to Agra after his father's death in 1627.

Khurram became Shāhjahān, the great Mughal patron of the arts, who commissioned the *Padshahnama*, in 1647 and built the famous, Taj Mahal. Shāhjahān's sons, Dārā Shikūh and Awrangzīb, began fighting for the throne when Shāhjahān fell ill in 1639. Twenty years later, in 1659, Awrangzīb finally won and began his long reign as the last great emperor of the Mughal Empire. Economic pressures during Awrangzīb's

⁵⁵ For a general history of the Mughal Empire, see John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

reign led to a series of rebellions across the empire, the most serious one being the Marāthā uprising in the Deccan in 1659. When Awrangzīb died, in 1707, the eighty-nine year old emperor had bled the empire dry of its resources in his unsuccessful bid to quell the Marāthās. The Mughal Empire slowly declined after his death and in 1858, the Mughals capitulated to the British Raj.

1.3.2 Religion and State Policy Under the Mughals

The success of the Mughal empire rested on a centralized system of government that revolved around the ruling emperor whose authority was carried out by a highly ordered administrative system with a lexicon of standardized imperial terminology. The administrative structure throughout the empire was standardized into townships (*pargāna*), districts (*sarkār*), and finally provinces (*sūbā*) with each province having its governor (*sūbedār*), fiscal officer (*diwān*), military intendants (*faujdār*), judges (*qāzis*), and ecclesiastical officers (*sadr*). All government business was carried out in Persian and property rights, criminal law, and even currency became standardized throughout the empire.

The Mughals thus devised a system of authority that sought to encompass social groups and institutions within a single ideology of governance. The Mughal government was the imperial government (*sarkār*) and every individual had his place within the overall empire. Former sultans and Hindu kings (*rājās*) entered into Mughal service as nobles (*mansabdārs*), officials in local government kept their positions in return for making tax payments to revenue administrators, and even the standardized system of land assessment (*zabt*) was conceived by the Mughals as a ritualized form of subservience: the

zabt system used taxation as a means of placing local landholding elites (*zamīndārs*) directly under the control of Mughal revenue officials.⁵⁶ Nothing was left untouched by the Mughals. Every individual had a rank in the political structure, but regardless of his local importance, he was never allowed to forget that his loyalty was to the Mughal Empire and its reigning emperor.

Religious affairs were not left untouched by the centralizing tendencies of the Mughal Empire. As the power of the emperor increasingly tightened, the *ulema* who had prospered during the Delhi Sultanate now found themselves being marginalized. Grants to the *ulema* that were fraudulently obtained or transferred illegally to heirs were revoked by Akbār and were followed by political measures that favored Hindus. Thus, from the reign of Akbār until the reign of Awrangzīb, the Mughals adopted a policy of favoring Hindus by abolishing the *jizyā*, celebrating major Hindu festivals at court, and recruiting Hindu kings into the Mughal nobility.⁵⁷ These steps were then followed by the act of taking the grants that once belonged to the members of the *ulema* and distributing them to non-Muslims. This constituted a process where potential recipients would plead their case to the court via the local ecclesiastical office (*sadr*) who would then pass on the requests to the Emperor. Land documents surviving from the Mughal period show that

⁵⁶ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, pp. 79-83.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the Rajput entry into the Mughal Empire, see Norman Ziegler's important article "Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties During the Mughal Period" in Subrahmanyam and Alam, eds. *The Mughal Empire*, pp. 168-212.

Hindu ascetics in the Punjab were the recipients of land endowments, which were annually renewed by Mughal emperors beginning with Akbar.⁵⁸

One sees this trend continuing even into the reign of the religiously conservative Awrangzib. Documents reveal that Awrangzib approved requests for financial aid from Hindu priests and that he continued to renew land grants to Hindu ascetics in the Punjab because of his interest in their practice of alchemy.⁵⁹ All that was expected in return for Awrangzib's patronage – and indeed the patronage of all Mughal emperors-- was that the recipients remain occupied in praying for the permanence of the empire. Thus, as was always the case with all Mughal subjects, religious communities too had an appointed place within the Mughal political structure. In the words of the emperor Jahangir, religious communities were to be the empire's "armies of prayer."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ For copies of these land grants and translations into English, see B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1967). Also see Goswamy and Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori; a historical interpretation of 52 Persian documents* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969).

⁵⁹ Awrangzib had requested the *jogis* in the Punjabi town of Jakhbar for some quicksilver for medicinal purposes and issued the following edict to Anand Nath, the head of the Jakhbar monastery. The edict states:

"The letter sent by Your Reverence has been received along with two *tolahs* of quicksilver. It is desired that Your Reverence should carefully treat some more quicksilver and have that sent, without unnecessary delay. A piece of cloth for a cloak and a sum of twenty-five rupees which have been sent as an offering will reach (Your Reverence). Also, a few words have been written to the valiant Fateh Chand to the effect that he should always afford (you) protection."

Translated by Goswamy and Grewal, in *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar*, pp. 120-124.

For other evidence of Awrangzib's patronage of Hindus, see Jnan Chandra's articles, "Alamgir's Grants to a Brahman," the *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 7 (1959), pp. 99-100 and "Alamgir's Grants to Hindu Pujaris," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 6 (1958), pp. 55-65.

⁶⁰ See chapter 1, part 1 of Jahangir, *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri or The Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Alexander Rogers (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978), p. 11.

It is not surprising, then, that temples constructed by the Hindu members of the Mughal nobility were intimately linked to imperial ideology. Temples were constructed as acts of religious piety, but temple construction during the Mughal period was more than an exercise in merit making and was intimately linked to Mughal economic and social policies. Thus one finds the emperor Jahangir encouraging his noblemen to build both secular and religious buildings in order to bring economic growth and social stability to political hinterlands.⁶¹ The need for political stability and control may help to explain why the Mughal Empire was so involved in the cult of the Hindu god Jagannāth in the eastern state of Orissa. During the annual festival in which the Jagannāth image would be pulled outside the temple in a car, Mughal officials would accompany the car in a chariot thus demonstrating that it was the Mughal Empire who was the deity's ultimate protector.⁶² Even Awrangzib seems to have followed the trend set by his predecessors. When *brahmins* in the city of Varanasi were being harassed by locals in 1659, Awrangzib issued an order to his local officials that the *brahmins* merited state protection so they could continue to pray undisturbed for the continuance of the empire. The order stated:

In these days information has reached our court that several people have, out of spite and rancour, harassed the Hindu residents of Benares and nearby places, including a group of Brahmans who are in charge of ancient temples there. These people want to remove those Brahmans from their charge of temple keeping, which has caused them considerable distress. Therefore, upon receiving this order, you must see that nobody unlawfully disturbs the Brahmans or other Hindus

⁶¹ See chapter 1, part 1 of Jahangir, *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri or the Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Alexander Rogers (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978). *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri*, pp. 7-8.

⁶² See Herman Kulke, "The Struggle between the Rajas of Khurda and the Muslim Subahdars of Cuttack for Dominance of the Jagannatha Cult" in Eschmann et al. eds, *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, pp. 331-333.

of that region, so that they might remain in their traditional place and pray for the continuance of the Empire.⁶³

What was noticeable, however, was the lack of state support for Hindu educational institutions run by *brahmins*. Centers of brahminical learning in cities like Varanasi were supported primarily by mercantile capital but even then, members of the brahminical community in Varanasi seemed to live in a state of anxiety. *Brahmins* in Varanasi continued to zealously keep their scriptures from public view for fear that Muslim officials would seize them and destroy them. For this segment of Hindu society, Muslim rule still posed a threat to Hindus and there was even a widespread belief among certain individuals that a manifestation of Viṣṇu would appear to rid their land of Islamic rule.⁶⁴

This sense of anxiety voiced by Varanasi *brahmins* about the society in which they lived was most clearly articulated by Tulsīdās (1532-1623), the *brahmin* devotional poet who was devoted to the god Rāma. Tulsīdās lamented the state of the society around him attributing the decline of brahminical influence and the rise of the Sant tradition to what he believed was the destruction of the Hindu caste system. The result of this breakdown was the spread of greed and hypocrisy, low-castes displacing *brahmins* as sources of religious authority, and the spread of severe poverty and disease throughout society.⁶⁵ Tulsīdās, however, did not call for the re-establishment of a golden age. The only

⁶³ Awrangzīb's order of April 1659 to officer Abu-l-Hassan of Benares. Translation by Richard Eaton in "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," p. 117.

⁶⁴ François Bernier, Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656-1668, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656-1668*, trans. A. Constable (Delhi: New Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1990), pp. 334-336.

⁶⁵ See couplets 67-102 in the seventh chapter of Tulsidas, *Shri Ramcharitamanasa*, trans. R.C. Prasad (Delhi: Motilal Banarasedass, 1994), pp. 633-636. Also see chapter 7, poems 169-176 of Tulsīdās' *Kavitāvālī* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1994), pp. 147-155.

salvation from a world full of misery came in chanting the name of Rāma and relying solely on his will. A response somewhat similar to that of Tulsīdās was voiced by two *brahmin* theologians, Caitanya and Vallabha, the founder of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Both – as will be fully detailed in the second chapter- offered their solution to the social and political circumstances in which they lived by trying to revitalize the Kṛṣṇaite pilgrimage site outside Delhi, known as Braj, in order to make it a center of Hindu religiosity that centered around a simple spiritual path that emphasized nothing more than a personal devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

1.3.3 Orthodox Muslim Reactions Against Mughal Religious Policy

Hindus like Tulsīdās were not alone in their criticism of Indian society during the Mughal period. Just as Tulsīdās believed that the societal chaos in which he lived was due to a breakdown in Hindu religious values, there were orthodox Muslims who attributed what they believed was societal chaos to the breakdown of Islamic values. A Mughal nobleman, historian, and contemporary of Akbar, Abd-ul-Qadir Badaoni, believed that Akbar's religious policies spelt the demise of Islamic values in society. In analyzing the refusal of Mughal authorities to interfere in the religious practices of non-Muslims, Badaoni came to the conclusion that licentiousness would spread throughout society and eventually would divert good Muslims from Islamic law.⁶⁶ The practice of image worship, the celebration of Hindu festivals at court, and the adoption of Hindu mannerisms and practices like *haṭha yoga* were all indicative of the threat of societal

⁶⁶ See Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhab Ut-Tawarikh*, trans. George S. A. Ranking (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Publications, 1990), p. 277.

disintegration. Thus Badaoni proposed a solution to this problem that was very similar to what Baranī proposed during the years of the Delhi Sultanate. Hindus were to have their temples destroyed and were to become second-class citizens within the empire.⁶⁷

The Naqshabandī Sufi shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564-1624) also voiced views similar to those held by Badaoni. In his theological treatises and in his letters to the emperor Jahangīr, Sirhindī voiced his displeasure over the religious liberalism fostered during the reign of Akbār and the adoption of Hindu customs by certain members of the Muslim community. He frowned upon the celebration of Hindu festivals at courts, he regarded *brahmins* as being intellectually incapable of understanding the mysteries of Islam, and he rejected Hindu and Sufi practices of self-mortification claiming that such practices were secondary to the complete observance of the five pillars of Islam.

Sirhindī also went one step further by rejecting any sort of similarity between Hindu and Sufi doctrine by emphasizing how the Hindu belief in *avatārs* was very distinct from Islamic views of Godhead. For Sirhindī, the notion that God's majesty could be limited to a physical body was thoroughly incompatible with Sufi teachings. Given his views on Hindus, it was thus unsurprising that at the state level, Sirhindī, like Baranī and Gangohī during the Sultanate period, insisted that rulers maintain the purity of the Islamic state by relegating Hindus to a state of subservience. Hindus and Muslims were to keep a safe distance from the other, Hindus were to be the subject to economic and political

⁶⁷ S.A.A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975), pp. 446-448.

discrimination, and their cows were to be slaughtered.⁶⁸ Jahangir, however, was not amused at what he believed was nonsensical and impractical advice. Jahangir thus judged Sirhindi to be mentally unbalanced and jailed the shaykh for a year.⁶⁹

1.4 Conclusion

When one surveys the long and turbulent political history of medieval North India, what is one to make of the relationship between religion and the Muslim state in this period? It can be said that there were political and administrative continuities that linked Muslim rulers to the Hindu regimes that preceded them because they all shared similar notions about the relationship between religious patronage and the process of state-building. For both Hindu and Muslim rulers, religious patronage was, on a certain level, a form of religious piety, but it was always linked to larger political concerns. Muslim rulers thus used a strategy similar to their Hindu counterparts that consisted of using religious patronage as a means of legitimizing regimes and bringing stability to their domains. Thus one finds similarities between the acts of religious patronage carried out by both Hindu and Muslim rulers. Rulers of both faiths employed acts of political inclusion, such as the sponsorship of local cults and the donation of land, in order to assimilate religious communities into the larger framework of the state and then use them as instruments to maintain state authority.

⁶⁸See Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi* (Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies, 1971), pp. 69-75.

⁶⁹ See chapter 2, part 2 of Jahangir, *Tuzuk-I-Jahangari*, pp.91-93.

Thus the goal of the Muslim state in medieval North India was not to enforce the supremacy of Islam, but to successfully manage a wide variety of religious groups that were part of the landscape of North Indian society. Within the Muslim community, there were orthodox Muslim clerics, shaykhs, and noblemen who voiced their opposition to the increased patronage of Hindus by Muslim rulers, while on the other hand, there were Sufis who interacted and at times competed with Hindu religious communities such as the Nāths and the Sants. The Sants, however were not only competing against their Muslim counterparts for influence in North Indian society, but also against their brahmanical counterparts for influence within Hindu society. It was the low-caste Sants, with their biting attacks against both Islamic clerics and Hindu priests, who were fast becoming dominant figures on the North Indian religious scene and this in turn sparked a reaction from segments of the brahminical community. Their response was to try stemming both the presence of Islam and the rising influence of the Sants by developing an alternative brahminical worldview that stressed a simple path of devotion to Rāma or Kṛṣṇa.

How, then, is one to describe the religious scene of medieval North India? Muzzafar Alam has appropriately called the relations between Hindu and Muslim religious communities as being a type of “competitive spirituality” in which members of religious communities vied with each other for influence within North Indian society.⁷⁰ Members of Hindu devotional communities debated and argued with each other over whose religious claims were superior in the same way Sufis and Islamic clerics vied for state

⁷⁰ See Alam’s article, “Co-existence: Indo-Islamic Interaction.”

patronage by articulating differing interpretations of Islamic law. This type of competitive form of spirituality also extended to the relationship between Hindus and Muslims and manifested itself in literature about each group's superiority over the other through the performance of superhuman feats or through acts of religious conversion.

This competitive spirituality underlines the fact that Hindus and Muslims did not live in complete harmony with each other, but it does not mean that the two groups felt hatred and animosity for the other. Hindus and Muslims accommodated each other in North Indian society, but at the same time competed against each other for social influence by articulating their own unique religious worldviews. The religious landscape of medieval North India was anything but static. It was an extremely lively and complex period in the religious history of India that formed the backdrop against which the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would make its presence known in North India in the pilgrimage area known as Braj.

Chapter 2

The Vaiṣṇava Traditions of Braj

The first chapter of this thesis focussed on giving a broad overview of the major forces of religious and political change that shaped North India between the Sultanate and Mughal periods. The most important change was the increased patronage of Hindu communities of which the principal beneficiaries were the Vaiṣṇava communities devoted to Kṛṣṇa and the residents of Braj (Sanskrit: Vraj). The area, several hours outside Delhi, has occupied an important place in the history of medieval North India because of the city of Mathura which served as an important political center for several ancient Hindu kingdoms as well as an important center of pilgrimage for both Jains and Buddhists. Braj, however, is better known for being the central site of pilgrimage for Hindus who have associated the land as being the birthplace of Kṛṣṇa and the area in which he passed his youth performing superhuman feats.

Kṛṣṇaite *bhakti*, however, cannot be said to truly have its origins in Braj. It had a long history in the subcontinent having emerged out of the larger context of the Vaiṣṇavite devotional tradition of South India that found its greatest expression in both vernacular poetry and the Sanskrit philosophical systems of major Vaiṣṇava communities that articulated their devotion not specifically to Kṛṣṇa, but primarily to Viṣṇu. Kṛṣṇaite *bhakti*, however, would only come to dominate the culture of Braj from the late fifteenth century onwards, in the midst of political turmoil caused by the disintegration of the Sultanate, and would only truly begin to flower under the patronage of Akbar.

This chapter will detail the history of Braj and how the growth of Kṛṣṇaite devotional culture in the area was impacted greatly by the changes in North India between the end of the Sultanate and the end of the rulership of Awrangzib over the Mughal empire. Before outlining the history of Braj, however, attention will be given to understanding the history of Kṛṣṇaite *bhakti* in the subcontinent and how this would in turn inspire devotional communities to Kṛṣṇa to articulate distinct, formal *bhakti* inspired philosophical systems around either *Viṣṇu* or his manifestation as Kṛṣṇa. Neither the accounts of Kṛṣṇaite theology or the history of Braj in this chapter claim to be exhaustive in nature. They have, rather, been concisely outlined in order better to understand the antecedents of *Puṣṭi Mārga* theology and the sweeping religious changes that Braj underwent when Vallabha, the founder of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, first came to Braj. Thus having situated Kṛṣṇaite *bhakti* and its impact on Braj within the framework of the socio-political and religious scene of medieval North India provided in the previous chapter, there should be enough context to make sense of the events described in the third chapter of this thesis: the theology of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and how the entry of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* into Braj would make this theological system an important part of Braj's religious culture.

2.1 Tracing the Origins of Kṛṣṇaite Bhakti and Kṛṣṇaite Devotional Literature

Tracing the history of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* in the subcontinent and its relationship to Vaiṣṇavism or the larger group of religious beliefs surrounding the worship of the god Viṣṇu is by no means an easy task. The history of Vaiṣṇavism is in itself extremely complex with its origins stretching back to Vedic literature, but it would become even

more complex as independent deities and the cults associated with them would become fused with the personality of Viṣṇu.¹ The first of these deities was Vāsudeva, the deified tribal hero of the North Indian Vṛṣṇi tribe, who came to be identified with Viṣṇu as early as the fourth century B.C.E. Greek accounts of Indian religious life in North India attested to a flourishing Vāsudeva cult whose members, in the fifth century Sanskrit text *Aṣṭādhyayi*, were called Vāsudevakas. The cult of Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva then merged with the Kṛṣṇa cult of the Yadava clan leading to the cult of the Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva, which would become very popular by the fourth century C.E. due to its members known as Bhāgavatas. It would also be in the fourth century C.E. when the Vedic god Nārāyaṇa would be identified as a manifestation of Viṣṇu. The most important phase in the development of Vaiṣṇavism would occur around the fourth or fifth century when the Bhāgavata cult would become fused with the cult of Kṛṣṇa practiced by a cowherd tribe known as the Abhīras. This would lead to what would be known as the cult of Kṛṣṇa-Gopāla.

Key Sanskrit texts would reflect this complicated development of Vaiṣṇavism and its impact on the personality of the deity known as Kṛṣṇa. The great Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata* (c. 400–300 B.C.E) focuses on a very human Kṛṣṇa as a warrior, king, and counselor, which is in somewhat sharp contrast to the *Bhagavad Gītā* (c.100 B.C.E.). The, *Gītā*, which was probably inserted into the *Mahābhārata*, identifies Kṛṣṇa as the supreme manifestation (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu who periodically descends to earth to wipe out evil. The fourth century appendix to the *Mahābhārata* entitled the *Harivaṃśa*, in

¹ This is based on Gavin Flood's discussion of the history of Kṛṣṇaite devotion in *An Introduction to*

contrast, focuses on the years before Kṛṣṇa's adulthood. Kṛṣṇa is depicted being born into a family of cowherds in the village of Gokula where he lives an idyllic life tending cows and playing numerous childhood pranks on his family and friends. He walks the earth destroying numerous demons and is finally depicted as the perfect sensual lover who gives pleasure to the local milkmaids by making love to them on a moonlit night.

These stories in turn would have an effect on the poetry of the Aḷvārs between the sixth and ninth centuries C.E. The Aḷvārs, a community of non-brahminical Vaiṣṇava poets from South India, stressed the importance of *viraha-bhakti* or the cultivation of an intense passionate devotion to Kṛṣṇa shaped by the pain (*viraha*) and yearning associated with being separated from the Divine. The poetry of the Aḷvārs would in turn shape the tenth century South Indian Sanskrit text, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The author of the *Bhāgavata* followed the narrative structure of the *Harivaṃśa*, but infused it with a highly intense devotional and erotic fervor by paraphrasing or translating the poetry of the Aḷvārs into Sanskrit and incorporating it in his work.

This narrative of the *Bhāgavata*, however, is framed within a larger metaphysical structure that emphasizes Kṛṣṇa as being the Ultimate Reality (*brahman*) whose extraordinary deeds are a manifestation of the Supreme Lord spinning out a divine play (*līlā*) for his own pleasure and for the pleasure of his devotees. Thus the night of lovemaking between Kṛṣṇa and the milkmaids on the banks of the river Yamuna has a deeper religious import in the *Bhāgavata* that is shaped around the concept of 'love-in-

Hinduism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 115-127.

separation' (*viraha-bhakti*) found in the poetry of the *Ālvārs*. The *gopīs*' obsessive longing (*viraha*) love for Kṛṣṇa and the intensification that occurs when they are separated from him is held as the ideal means by which to directly approach the Lord. Just as the *gopīs* give up all of their worldly duties out of their passionate desire to be with God, so too should the devotee cultivate a similar type of intense love towards Kṛṣṇa.² This, in turn, brings about the ideal state of liberation for a devotee of Kṛṣṇa: the constant experience of the Divine that comes from alternating between states of union and separation from God. This glorification of Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord of the universe has come to be known as Kṛṣṇaism which stands in contra-distinction to Vaiṣṇavism which celebrates Viṣṇu as the Supreme Lord and Kṛṣṇa as one of his many manifestations.

2.1.1 Vaiṣṇava Bhakti Communities

Vaiṣṇavism, however, is a term also used to encompass all religious communities (*sampradāyas*) which have come to revolve purely around the worship of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu. The devotional literature of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Ālvārs* poetry would come to shape the theological frameworks of a number of these communities which endeavored to offer philosophical alternatives to counterpoint the popular philosophical school of non-dualism (*Advaita Vedānta*) as propounded by the philosopher *Śaṅkara* (c 788-820 C.E.). *Śaṅkara* viewed the world as being the product of the illusory power (*māyā*) of a formless

² For the classic study of *viraha bhakti* and its relationship to Alvar poetry, see Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 481-542.

Supreme Being (*brahman*) thus causing the individual soul (*jīva*) to forget that his identity was identical to that of the Supreme Creator of the universe. The salvation of the individual soul thus came from acquiring the knowledge that the world was unreal and that he shared an essential unity with the divine *brahman*. This knowledge in turn came by renouncing all the material comforts to embark on the life of an ascetic who would use the practice of *yoga* to discipline his body and mind to free himself from all desires. In doing so, the ascetic would achieve that level of discrimination necessary to realize that he shared an essential unity with a formless Divine. The illusory world around him would disappear and the individual would merge into *brahman*.

Vaiṣṇava theological communities inspired by the *Bhāgavata* and the *Ālvār* tradition argued vociferously against this position, all asserting that the Absolute was not a formless being, but either Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, who could be approached through the acts of loving surrender and devotion.³ Madhva, the thirteenth century philosopher from Karnataka, rejected the claims of *Advaita Vedānta* outright. He argued for a type of dualism (*Dvaita Vedānta*) that posited that all elements in the universe were unique and independent entities whose relationship to each other were characterized by five categories of difference which thus affirmed both the multiplicity and independence of all souls within the universe. Madhva thus argued that despite these distinctions between beings in the universe, nothing could exist outside the will of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu

³ The following short discussion of Vaiṣṇavite philosophical traditions is based upon Gerard Colas, "History of Vaiṣṇava Traditions: An Equisse," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin Flood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 229-270.

upon whom all beings are dependent for their support. Thus, those who sought liberation from the cycle of life would surrender themselves onto the Lord and find their ultimate fulfillment in experiencing the bliss of the Lord.

The twelfth century South Indian philosopher Rāmānuja (c.1017-1137), on the other hand, did not reject Śaṅkara's non-dualism, but instead sought to modify it by calling his philosophical system the "Non-Dualism of the Qualified" (*Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta*).

Rāmānuja argued that the Divine in the form of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu pervaded throughout the universe in the souls of all human beings. Thus, for Rāmānuja, when one surrendered fully to the Lord and worshipped him lovingly in temples he would receive liberation: this was defined as developing the awareness of the all-pervading nature of the Divine and that, although being distinct entities in themselves, all human souls make up the body of God. In achieving liberation, one would come to realize that each and every soul was in fact a manifestation of God's luminous being. The thirteenth century North Indian philosopher, Nimbārka, in contrast, would instead try to straddle both dualism and non-dualism (*Dvaitādvaita*). He argued that the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa is simultaneously one and distinct from all beings who, through the practice of devotion, earn the Divine grace necessary for one's liberation and union with Kṛṣṇa.

The Gauḍīya community of Bengal founded by Caitanya (1486-1533) in the sixteenth century was, however, noticeably different from Nimbārka and his other counterparts. Caitanya did not leave behind any formal philosophical treatises and instead advocated nothing more than the ecstatic group chanting of Kṛṣṇa's name. It was

his later followers who would create a systematic theology surrounding Kṛṣṇa and his favorite female companion, Rādhā.⁴ Kṛṣṇa is conceived as the Supreme Lord of the universe who presides over the repeated creation and dissolution of the universe while Rādhā is conceived as Kṛṣṇa's divine energy that gives him the power to maintain the universe. Kṛṣṇa is thus one who is the receptacle of power (*śaktimat*) while Rādhā is his principal source of power (*śakti*). Thus the divine couple are conceived as being indeed two distinct entities whose complimentary natures bind their souls together to make them one united whole. This relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is termed in Gauḍīya theology as 'inconceivable identity and difference' (*acintya-bhedābheda*).

The concrete manifestation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's union on an earthly level is described in Gauḍīya theology through the erotic love making between the divine couple and how, for Rādhā, the intensity of that passion is intensified through her periods of separation from Kṛṣṇa. Rādhā's passion for Kṛṣṇa thus becomes the role model for the spiritual life of the devotee. Human sexual desire is to be channeled towards the Divine and is transformed into a divine, transcendent, erotic love (*śṛṅgāra-bhakti*) that is passionate and all consuming in nature. This all-consuming and spontaneous expression of spiritual desire is called in Gauḍīya theology, *rāgānuga-bhakti* and is contrasted with *vaidhi-bhakti*. *Vaidhi-bhakti* represents worship carried out according to the formal rules and injunctions in Hindu scriptures and is considered not only difficult to perform but too stifling and mechanical in nature to be considered a true form of devotion. *Rāgānuga-*

⁴ The following discussion of the theological conception of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is based on David Kinsley's fine and concise discussion in *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), pp. 88-92.

bhakti. is considered more efficacious and desirable for it allows the devotee to approach Kṛṣṇa in the most intimate way possible as a lover who can spontaneously express his or her innate longing and desire for the Lord. Thus the key concept of *acintya-bhedābheda* is affirmed yet again, but in the context of the relationship between the devotee and God. Neither merges into the other, but instead maintain their separate identities bound together by the ever-intensifying love of the devotee.

2.1.2 Regional Manifestations of Kṛṣṇaite Bhakti

The inspiration for this elaborate Gauḍīya conception of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa came in part from the twelfth century Sanskrit poem known as the *Gītagovinda* which was written by Jayadeva. The text depicts Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, who after a lovers' quarrel, and expressions of jealousy reunite after a period of separation to make passionate love in a grove in Vrindavan by the banks of the Yamuna River. The text was produced in the cultural milieu of Puri in Orissa where the tribal deities of Jagannāth, Balabhadra, and Subhadrā were housed in a massive temple complex and worshipped respectively as Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa's brother, and Kṛṣṇa's sister.

On the other side of the subcontinent in Western India, another regional form of Kṛṣṇaite devotion grew up in Maharashtra in two manifestations. The first manifestation of Kṛṣṇaite *bhakti* found its expression in the thirteenth century *Mahānubhāva* community whose founder, Cakradhar Svāmi, and four of his disciples were considered to be five manifestations of Kṛṣṇa.. The second was centered around the pilgrimage center of Pāṇdharpur where worship to the local deity Viṭhobā or Viṭṭhala was shaped

very strongly by Kṛṣṇaite themes. Viṭṭhala is worshipped with Rakhumāyī the Marathi form of Rukmiṇī who was married to Kṛṣṇa when he spent his adulthood ruling from the city of Dwarka in Gujarat.

It is not surprising, then, that Gujarat too would become an important center for Kṛṣṇaite devotion. Temples to Viṣṇu were active throughout the time of the Sultanate and by the time of the Mughal period, temples to Kṛṣṇa were established in Dakor, Samlaji, Mandvi, and, of course, Dvarka which was now revered as one of the four most sacred pilgrimage sites in India. The impetus for this upswing in Kṛṣṇaite devotion in Gujarat was due in large part to the fifteenth century Gujarati poet, Narsi Mehta (1412-1480), whose Gujarati poetry concerning Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa would inspire future Gujarati poets of the medieval period to follow in his footsteps.

The history of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* was thus a most complicated one and reflected as a set of religious beliefs that celebrated Kṛṣṇa as the supreme *brahman* of the universe while Vaiṣṇavism referred to Viṣṇu as the Supreme Lord of the universe. Each of these two streams of devotion in turn spawned a number of different *bhakti* communities termed as 'Vaiṣṇava' which, though unique in nature, all stressed that the origin of creation was not from an abstract divine being (*nirguṇa brahman*) but from a Supreme Lord with personal qualities (*saguṇa brahman*). Whether it was Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, all Vaiṣṇavite devotional communities also emphasized that the best means to approach the Divine was to surrender oneself to the Lord and serve him with passion and that passionate love could be cultivated through temple worship, the practice of ecstatic chanting, visiting

pilgrimage sites, or through hearing the exploits of the Lord as recounted in central Vaiṣṇavite scriptures. The key scriptural text for devotees of Kṛṣṇa would become the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which extolled the divine exploits of the cowherd Kṛṣṇa in his homeland of Braj.

2.2 The Early History of Braj

Braj has a long and rather complex history revolving around the key political and religious center of North India known as Mathura. Archaeological evidence suggests that a possible settlement had been established in the vicinity of Mathura during the seventh century B.C.E and it is definitely clear that a town had been developed and fortified in the area between the fourth century B.C.E. and second century B.C.E.⁵ It was during this time period that Mathura began to grow. Its location on the Yamuna River and its close proximity to the main trade routes that connected travelers to North, South, and Eastern India transformed Mathura into one of the most important commercial, administrative, and political centers in North India.⁶ The Śunga dynasty that ruled over the city during the first century C.E. was behind Mathura's transformation into an influential political center, which it remained even after the decline of the Sungas in the second century C.E. The Hindu rulers who followed – the Mītras, Śakas, Kuṣāṇas, Nāgas, and Gurjar

⁵ Alan Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen: Forsten, 1997), pgs 110-11.

⁶ Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 111. Also see Siva G. Bajpai, "Mathurā: Trade Routes, Commerce, and Communication Patterns, Post-Mauryan Period to the End of the Kuṣāṇa Period," in *Mathurā: The Cultural History*, ed. Doris Meth Srinivasan (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), pp. 46-58.

Pratihāras – maintained Mathura's importance in North India until the Pratihāra dynasty disintegrated into feuding kingdoms that were overtaken by Muslim rule in the eleventh century.⁷

The period of Hindu rule proved to be advantageous for all of the many religions practiced in the Mathura area. Royal and mercantile patronage were beneficial for Buddhists who then turned Mathura into a major center of Buddhist pilgrimage with magnificent Buddhist reliquaries (*stūpas*) dotting the landscape of the city. Both the Śvetāmbara and Digāmbara schools of Jainism also flourished in Mathura from the second century B.C.E. onwards due to mercantile patronage and soon Mathura became a site of pilgrimage to Jains who believed that two enlightened beings (*īrthāṅkaras*) named Nemināth and Parsvanātha, had at one time visited the city. Jainism continued to thrive and by the fourth century C.E., Mathura became a place of such importance in Jainism that a council was held there to discuss the final redaction of the Jain scriptural canon.⁸

While Jainism and Buddhism flourished in the Mathura area, the locals continued to worship snakes (*nāgās*), spirits (*yakṣas*), and a host of gods of which the most important was Śiva. Śaivite temples were erected on the outskirts of the city and Śiva came to be known to his devotees as the protector of Mathura who was so omnipresent that the

⁷ For a detailed consideration of the dynasties that ruled during this time period, see Romila Thapar, "The History of Mathurā: Up to and Including the Mauryan Period," in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, ed. Doris Meth Srinivasan (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), pp. 12-18. Also see in the same volume, B.D. Chattopadhyaya, "Mathura From Sunga to the Kuṣāṇa Period: An Historical Outline," pp. 19-30.

⁸ Entwistle, *Braj*, pp. 112-114.

Nandagaon hills outside Mathura were considered to be the form of the god himself.⁹ Devotees of various local goddesses (*devīs*) also made their presence known in Braj by erecting temples where they propitiated goddesses for children, husbands, and for the protection of their families.¹⁰ Equally important was the cult to Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva which was inspired by the narrative contained in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which exulted Braj as a sacred place worthy of the devotee's adoration for it was the land in which Kṛṣṇa carried out his earthly pastimes (*līlās*).¹¹

2.2.1 The Transformation of Braj

By the eleventh century, Mathura was fully integrated into the network of Hindu temple cities that flourished throughout India under the patronage of Hindu rulers. With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, however, Mathura began to decline as a center of politics and economic growth, but religious life nonetheless continued in Braj. The city still retained its status as one of the most important pilgrimage centers in India and worship continued in the city's main temple dedicated to Viṣṇu in the form of Keśavadeva.¹² Worship also continued to flourish at Govardhan, a hill in the vicinity of Mathura, which was reputed to have been lifted with one hand by Kṛṣṇa himself. The

⁹ Charlotte Vaudeville, "Braj Lost and Found," in *Myths, Saints, Legends in Medieval India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 61.

¹⁰ Vaudeville, "Braj Lost and Found," pp. 62-71.

¹¹ For a useful summary of the Kṛṣṇa cycle of myths see, Benjamin Preciado-Solis, *The Kṛṣṇa Cycle in the Purāṇas: Themes and Motifs in a Heroic Saga* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984). Also see Entwistle's summary in *Braj*, pp. 22-60, 116-122.

¹² Mathura, Dvaraka, Rameshvaram, and Puri are considered to be the four most sacred pilgrimage sites in India. The importance of Mathura as a pilgrimage center even in the Sultanate period is outlined in a Sanskrit text called the *Māthurāmāhātmya*. See Entwistle, *Braj*, pp. 135-136, 232-234.

well-known and respected Vaiṣṇavite ascetic Mādhavendra Purī performed worship to what appeared to be a black stone image of Kṛṣṇa while local residents made regular offerings of milk to the hill because it was viewed as housing serpent deities and human spirits.¹³ Also worshipped was the river goddess Yāmuna who passed through the Braj area and promised to wipe away the sins of those individuals who bathed in her waters with devotion.¹⁴

Kṛṣṇaite activity, however, would begin to increase towards the end of the fifteenth century in the midst of serious political chaos that befell North India between the disintegration of the Sultanate into regional kingdoms and entrenchment of Mughal power under Akbar. In the midst of this period of upheaval, the members of the Nimbārka community centered in Mathura under the South Indian theologian Keśava Kāśmīrī Bhaṭṭ increased their activities from their center in Mathura while Īśvara Purī and Mādhavendra Purī, both associated with a Vaiṣṇavite monastery in Kerala, continued to gain respect for their proficiency in Kṛṣṇaite theology. Braj would undergo its greatest transformation in the early part of the sixteenth century. Caitanya arrived there for a pilgrimage with the purpose of rediscovering sites sacred to Kṛṣṇa that were thought to have disappeared with Kṛṣṇa's departure from Braj.¹⁵ Caitanya visited Mathura where Kṛṣṇa was born and

¹³ For a consideration of the history of Govardhan and the legends surrounding the worship of the hill, see Vaudeville's classic series of essays on Govardhan in Charlotte Vaudeville, *Myths, Saints, and Legends in Medieval India*, pp. 72-196. The essays make up the first section of Vaudeville's book.

¹⁴ Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 136.

¹⁵ For a very brief summary of Caitanya's travels through Braj see Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, p. 143-144. For a larger history of the Caitanya and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavite community which

proceeded to tour the twelve forests surrounding the Braj area where he is said to have embraced trees, gazed in amazement at the peacocks and deer, and dove into ponds which he believed had been frequented by Kṛṣṇa and his great love, Rādhā. Two such ponds, named Rādhākuṇḍ and Shyamkuṇḍ, were rediscovered by Caitanya in the vicinity of Govardhan and were believed to be bathing sites for both Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.¹⁶

In the town of Nandagaon, a small town associated with Kṛṣṇa's early childhood, Caitanya installed images of Kṛṣṇa and his parents and then proceeded to Vrindavan, the town associated with Kṛṣṇa's amorous dalliances with the milkmaid of Braj.¹⁷ Yet again Caitanya fell into a state of emotional frenzy as he recognized still more locations associated with Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Sites along the banks of the river Yamuna were associated with sites where Kṛṣṇa killed demons; others were associated with groves where Kṛṣṇa had spent time with Rādhā and the milkmaids of his village; other sites were identified as the places where Kṛṣṇa played pranks on the residents of Braj.

Caitanya's followers would continue the task begun by their spiritual teacher.

Caitanya's two disciples, the brothers Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmin, made their homes in Vrindavana where they systematized Gauḍīya theology and wrote religious texts that explained the meditative techniques necessary for visualizing the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and

he founded, S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961).

¹⁶ David Haberman, *Journey through the Twelve Forests: A Encounter with Krishna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 64.

¹⁷ Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, pp. 65.

Rādhā. The final product of Rūpa's meditative experience was his *Mathurāmāhātmya*, which conceived of Braj as a lotus whose petals were the groves of Braj and whose center was occupied by Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and their female attendants.¹⁸ It was this same process of meditation that produced Raghunathdās' Sanskrit text *Vrajavilāsastava*, which built upon Rūpa's vision of Braj by further describing the sacred sites of Braj and their connection to Kṛṣṇa and his companions.¹⁹

It was also this process of meditation that allowed the mid-sixteenth century Gauḍīya devotee, Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ, to provide the most complex and thorough Gauḍīya conception of Braj in a series of Sanskrit works of which the most important was the *Vrajavilāsastotra*. It was this text which detailed Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ's rediscovery of several ponds around Govardhan, his rediscovery of Rādhā's childhood home, his discovery of the childhood home of Rādhā's companion, Lalitā, and his rediscovery of additional sites associated with Kṛṣṇa's erotic pastimes and superhuman feats. Narayan Bhaṭṭ's vision of Braj would prove to be important for later Gauḍīya devotees. His vision of Braj, with its minute description of hills, mountains, groves, rivers, and sacred birthplaces, came to represent the standard Gauḍīya vision of Braj and would provide the basis for the *ban yātrā*, the 662 mile pilgrimage undertaken by Gauḍīyas through Braj's towns, villages, and forests.²⁰

¹⁸ Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 148. For an extensive of the discussion of Braj as a *yogapīṭha*, see Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, pp. 246-252. Also see Maura Corcoran, *Vṛndavana in Vaiṣṇava Literature* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld Ltd. 1995), pp.95-114.

¹⁹ Entwistle, *Braj*, pp. 255-256.

²⁰ Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, pp. 55-63 and Entwistle, *Braj*, pp. 252-255.

Other religious communities soon followed suit. The theologian and contemporary of Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmin, Hit Harivaṃś, was reputed to have been directed by Rādhā herself to live in Vrindavana where he installed, in 1534 C.E., an image of Kṛṣṇa known as Rādhāvallabha. His followers would come to make up what was known as the Rādhāvallabhite community, a community known for its fervent devotion to Rādhā as the embodiment of love and compassion.²¹ In the same time period yet another leading religious figure established himself in Braj. The poet, musician, and devotee, Svāmi Haridās came to Vrindavana during the same time as Harivaṃś and Caitanya's disciples and lived in a grove named Nidhiban where he and his followers – the members of the Haridāsa community – worshipped Kṛṣṇa under the name of Bāke Bīhārī.²² The Nimbarka community meanwhile continued to flourish during the sixteenth century partly due to its prominent theologian, Śrībhṭṭ. It was his successor Harivyāsdev, who would be responsible for dividing up the Nimbārka community into twelve branches that would practice Kṛṣṇaite devotions throughout the Braj area.²³

²¹ For histories of the Rādhāvallabha community, see Vijayendra Snatak, *Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya: siddhānta aura sāhityā* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1968) and Lalitacāraṇ Gosvāmi, *Hit Bhakta Gāthā* (Vrindavana: Veṇu Prakāśana, 1997).

²² Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 156.

2.2.2 Mughal Patronage of Braj in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar would prove to be a turning point in the history of Braj. Given its close proximity to the political centers of Agra and Delhi, Braj became the recipient of generous imperial patronage under Akbar's reign. In 1598 C.E. Akbar had commissioned his chief ideologue and confidant, Abu Fazl, to undertake a survey of the Braj area to determine what type of land endowments would be given to temples in Vrindavana, Mathura, and Nandagaon. Abu Fazl consulted four *brahmins* from Mathura for information and then conferred a total of thirty-five land grants to temples throughout the Braj region. Existing land grants to eight temples were modified by Akbar to ensure that the grants would remain in effect in perpetuity to temple complexes while a total of 600 acres of land were to be divided among the remaining twenty-seven temples.²⁴

The temples that came to benefit the most were those owned by the Gauḍiya community. The Gauḍiyas had built longstanding ties with Toḍar Mal and Mān Singh, two prominent Hindu noblemen in Akbar's court who are mentioned in surviving land grants as being patrons of the Gauḍiya community. Toḍar Mal was the source of capital behind Narayan Bhaṭṭ's quest to rediscover the lost pilgrimage sites of Braj and it was Toḍar Mal who ensured the prosperity of the Madanmohan and Govindadev temples by arranging for land grants and securing imperial recognition for Gauḍiya ownership of

²³ Entwistle, pp. 132, 171-172.

²⁴ Tarapada Mukherjee and Ifran Habib, "Akbar and the Temples of Mathura and Its Environs", *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 48 (1987), p. 239.

both temples.²⁵ Mān Singh and the royal family of Amber, to which he belonged, were equally generous in their patronage. The Amber family was known to have sponsored temple construction projects around Braj that started from the mid-sixteenth century and would culminate in Mān Singh's magnificent restoration of the Govindadev temple in 1590.²⁶

This trend in patronage would continue with Akbār's successors, the emperors Jahangīr and Shāhjahān. Jahangīr added two more temples to Akbār's list of thirty-five temples, he continued Akbār's practice of issuing tax-exempt land grants, and took steps to ensure that the Amber family would retain a firm interest in the management of the Govindadeva temple²⁷. Shāhjahān officially recognized the close association between the Amber family and the management of Govindadeva, personally authorized the use of a temple gong for services at the temple of Madanmohan, and took great pains to enforce the land grants procured by temples the at time of Akbār and Jahangīr. What is striking, however, is the degree of involvement that Shāhjahān took in the affairs of the Gauḍiya community. He was instrumental in ensuring that the Govindadeva temple would remain under the control of the Amber family in 1644, and used his representatives in Braj to

²⁵ Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 160.

²⁶ Entwistle, *Braj*, pp. 159-160. For a detailed consideration of the Govindadeva temple see Catherine. Asher, "Kacchavāhā Pride and Prestige: The Temple Patronage of Rāja Māna Simha," in *Govindadeva: Dialogue in Stone*, ed. Margaret Case (Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Performing Arts, 1996), pp. 215-238 and Catherine. Asher, "Mughal Sub-Imperial Patronage: The Architecture of Raja Mān Singh," *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture.*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 183-201.

²⁷ Tarapada Mukherjee and Irfan Habib, "The Mughal Administration and the Temples of Vrindavan During the Reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan," *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 48 (1988), pp. 287-289.

arbitrate disputes concerning the management of the Govindadeva temple and disputes that occurred over Gauḍiṃya landholdings in Rādhākūṇḍ. Thus one finds instances of local officials having to arbitrate water disputes, to enforce imperial orders, to expel individuals who were disrupting temple services, and to resolve questions pertaining to the taxation of temples.²⁸

Mughal involvement in Braj did not seem to be construed as interference by the area's religious communities but, on the contrary, was viewed as being indispensable in maintaining the economic and social stability of the area so worship could continue unfettered in Vaiṣṇava shrines. This period of stability between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries allowed for the flowering of a rich tradition of art and culture in the area. During this time period Braj witnessed the development of the elaborate art of *sāñjhī* which depicted the life of Kṛṣṇa by sprinkling colored powder through stencils. It was this period that saw the rise of the important and very popular tradition of *rās līlā* or dramatic re-enactments of Kṛṣṇa's life by professional drama troupes.²⁹

This period of stability also allowed for devotional poetry to be written in *Braj Bhāṣa*, the dialect of Hindi that was thought to have been spoken by Kṛṣṇa himself when he lived in Braj. Collections of poetry (*padas*) written by such poets as Sūrdās, Hit Harivaṃś, or Svāmi Haridās contained elegant outpourings of devotion to Kṛṣṇa, which were then sung

²⁸ Mukherjee and Habib, "The Mughal Administration and the Temples of Vrindavan," pp. 291-292, 296-299.

²⁹ Entwistle, *Braj*, pp. 85-87, 106.

in sectarian temples during the course of services. Information about these poets, however, is shrouded in legend, with their lives preserved in hagiographies written in *Braj Bhāṣa*, such as the *Rasik Ananya Māl* of the Rādhāvallabha community.³⁰

The popularity of Kṛṣṇaite themes, however, extended well beyond the boundaries of the religious communities that cultivated them and the Kṛṣṇa story soon came to be embraced by Muslim poets. Raskhān, whose large but simple mausoleum stands on the outskirts of Kṛṣṇa's childhood home of Gokul, was known for his concise, but nonetheless elaborate descriptions in *Braj Bhāṣa* of Kṛṣṇa's dalliances with the milkmaids of Braj. Another *Braj Bhāṣa* poet was the great Mughal general Abdurrāhim Khānkhānā, popularly known as Rāhim, who also passionately embraced Kṛṣṇaite themes and described with great sensuality the erotic pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

These erotic descriptions of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa relationship would in turn become the central theme of sixteenth century court poetry that was written in *Braj Bhāṣa* and depicted Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa not as a god and goddess, but as archtypical lovers whose relationship illustrated the many facets of secular love. With its use in royal courts, *Braj Bhāṣa* came to be popular throughout North India and would maintain its position as the

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of *Braj Bhāṣa* poetry including translations of poetry and hagiography such as the *Rasika Ananya Māl*, see the introduction to Rupert Snell, *The Hindi Classical Tradition: A Braj Bhāṣa Reader* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1992).

lingua franca of North India well into the nineteenth century when it was replaced by modern standard Hindi.³¹

2.2.3 Braj from the Mid-Seventeenth Century to the End of the Eighteenth Century

The prosperity and stability that Braj experienced during the sixteenth century would come to a stop in the mid-seventeenth century during the reign of Awrangzib. The Marathā rebellions against the empire sparked further rebellions by the Rājput, the Sikhs, and by the warrior-cultivators of Braj, known as the Jāts. It was the Jāt rebellion that proved to be the most disruptive to Braj and, consequently, caused the exodus of sacred images from the area.³² The Gauḍiya temples of Govindadev, Gopīnāth, Madanmohan, Rādhāvinod, and Rādhādāmodar were abandoned as Gauḍiya devotees took their images to the state of Rajasthan where they sought refuge with the Hindu rulers in the area. The image of Govindadev was installed in Jaipur; Madanmohan was installed in Karauli, while Rādhādāmodar was housed temporarily in Jaipur.

Other images were hidden or housed in secret locations until the rebellions in Braj came to an end. The image of Rādhāvallabha worshipped by the Rādhāvallabhite community was taken to Kaman and remained there before being returned to Braj in the late eighteenth century. The deities housed in the *Lārī* temple of Barsana were moved to locations in central India while the images of Rādhāraman and Bāke Bihārī were hidden

³¹ Snell, *The Hindi Classical Tradition*, pp. 39-42.

in Braj until stability came back to the region. The rulership of Braj by the Jāts did little to bring back stability to the area. There was increased lawlessness in Braj and while certain religious communities did enjoy some religious patronage under the Jāts and the Marāṭhās, neither the generous patronage of the Mughals nor the many images that had departed from Braj ever returned to the area again. By the end of the eighteenth century, Braj had failed to reach the same level of prosperity that it once enjoyed in the years prior to the disintegration of the Mughal Empire.

2.3 Conclusion: Evaluating the Growth of Braj in the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth Centuries

Despite the long history of Kṛṣṇaite devotion in the subcontinent and its exaltation of Braj as an area worthy of adoration, Kṛṣṇaite culture did not dominate the area until the late part of the fifteenth century. Prior to the sixteenth century, Braj was an amalgam of cults worshipping snakes, trees, spirits, and a wide variety of deities that included Kṛṣṇa. In other words, prior to the sixteenth century, Kṛṣṇa was just one of many deities who were worshipped in Braj. This changed when Braj underwent a major transformation during a troubled period in the history of medieval North India. Increased amounts of Kṛṣṇaite activity came from within Braj as well as from the outside in the case of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community of Bengal who settled in Braj with the purpose of reclaiming the land for Kṛṣṇa.

³² Entwistle, *Braj*, pgs 183-187.

The Gauḍiṣya community accomplished this by a process of externalization.³³ This process involved the meditative practice of visualizing the Braj outlined in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other Vaiṣṇavite scriptures and then making those visualizations physically concrete by visiting the actual land of Braj itself. The result of this process was the identification of every tank, pond, hill, and town with the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa, which were then celebrated in Sanskrit and *Braj Bhāṣa* texts. What in turn allowed for the cultivation of *Braj Bhāṣa* and the entire Vaiṣṇavite culture of Braj was a liberal religious policy articulated by the Mughals that linked the patronage of religious communities to economic growth and the maintenance of state authority.

Does that mean, however, that the growth of Braj during the sixteenth century could not have occurred without Mughal patronage? Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* had an extremely long history in the subcontinent that predated Muslim rule and continued to remain active despite the weakening of the Hindu political structure in North India during the Sultanate. There is no doubt that Kṛṣṇaite activity would have continued to be active regardless of the Mughal presence in North India, but the economic and social stability brought about by Mughal patronage made it considerably easier for religious communities to peacefully continue their religious activities.

This flowering of religious activity in Braj that occurred in the late fifteenth century was to, an extant, an extension of the discontent that Kabīr and Nānak expressed over the state of affairs over the final days of the Lodī dynasty and the warfare that came with the

³³ Haberman, *Journey Through The Twelve Forests*, p. 54.

initial phases of Mughal conquest in North India. The only difference, however, was that this discontent was expressed from a Vaiṣṇavite perspective that did not voice the radical criticism of North Indian society voiced by the Sants and instead sought to increase devotion to Kṛṣṇa by reviving religious activity in Kṛṣṇa's homeland. The individuals who articulated this Vaiṣṇavite solution to the ills of society were not recruited from mercantile communities or from the lower-castes of Hindu society. They were Hindu *brahmins* who carefully maintained their purity and all other Hindu values that were integral to the maintenance of the *varṇāśramadharma* system that structured Hindu society.

Is the growth of Braj, therefore, to be interpreted as a pure and unbridled expression of a resurgent Hinduism in the face of Muslim domination? Vaiṣṇavite communities within Braj did not band together to form a united politically motivated religious movement that would openly agitate against Muslim rule through violence or open polemic. The religious leaders of the Braj Vaiṣṇava communities were all *brahmins* for whom, historically, political and social stability had always been crucial in order to ensure a steady source of patronage guaranteeing their well being. It was, therefore, not terribly surprising that they took advantage of Akbar's liberal religious policy to revert to the traditional means of seeking patronage by approaching Hindu political patrons who, in this case were very prominent members of the Mughal nobility. For these noblemen, their patronage activities in Braj allowed them to resume their traditional duties of Hindu rulers as religious and artistic patrons without having to compromise their commitment as

members of the Mughal nobility to enforce state policy and maintain the stability of the empire.

The ‘rediscovery’ of Braj by Vaiṣṇava communities was more indicative of the reorganization of Indian society that took place between the demise of the Sultanate power and the entrenchment of Mughal power in India under Akbār. The Mughal had expanded its power over North India after much bloodshed. Political alliances with Hindu kings were reconfigured, traditional Islamic clerics became marginalized, and non-Muslims began to enjoy more prominence religiously and politically. All these groups were, in turn, managed by a highly centralized governmental structure that was designed to ensure political stability and constant loyalty to the emperor. The rediscovery of Braj within this context was about a socially conservative group of Hindu society—represented by both *brahmins* and members of the Hindu nobility—who, in the midst of that important transition period were endeavoring to reassert their traditional religious identities within a new political and societal framework that was tightly controlled by the Mughal regime.

The result was not an unbridled resurgence of a form of brahminically led Hindu religiosity, but the expression of religious identity that was constrained by the political considerations of accruing greater influence and visibility by avoiding direct conflict with the political structures of the time. Thus arose a longstanding form of religiosity within Hinduism known as Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* whose adherents, in adapted to the socio-political and economic changes that came with the presence of Mughal rule. The result was the flowering of a rich and vibrant religious culture surrounding Kṛṣṇa which was cultivated

by the numerous religious communities in the Braj area. This growth in Kṛṣṇaite *bhakti* was carried out primarily by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavites of Bengal, but there was one community whose influence in the transformation of Braj was equal to that of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavites. The name of this community was the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.

Chapter 3

Tracing the History of the Puṣṭi Mārga: 1493-1670

The religious culture of North India had undergone many transformations by the end of the seventeenth century. North India in the pre-Sultanate era was ruled by independent Hindu kings who maintained their power to rule in part through acts of religious patronage such as temple construction and the financial support of *brahmins* whose ritual expertise was considered to be paramount in maintaining the kingdom's spiritual welfare. The establishment of the Sultanate, however, dramatically changed this situation. North India was no longer an area associated primarily with temples and Hindu deities, but was now transformed with the presence of Muslim *ulema* in their mosques, Sufi *shaykhs* in the hospices, and the wandering Nāth *yogis*. One also witnessed the increasing participation of mercantile and artisinal groups in roles of religious leadership, seeking to articulate religious worldviews that could serve as alternatives to the Vedic rites and the rituals of traditional temple Hinduism which were traditionally the preserve of the brahminical community. The realignment of North Indian society that came with the establishment of Mughal power under Akbar made the already crowded religious scene of North India even more complex. Sufis, tantriks, *jogis*, *ulema*, *brahmins*, Punjabi Vaiṣṇavas, and various streams of the Sant tradition ranging from the followers of Nānak and Kabīr to Dādū and Malūkdās all found themselves offering competing worldviews under the watchful eye of an empire that used patronage to ensure that religious communities would be in the service of the state.

One of these many religious communities were the Vaiṣṇava communities of Braj who responded to the times in which they lived by increasing their devotional activity in

the area with the help of Mughal patronage. Mughal patronage not only assured prosperity for the Vaiṣṇava communities who lived in the region, but also allowed Hindu noblemen and members of the brahminical community to reassert their traditional roles as the safe keepers of Hinduism without having to come into direct conflict with their Mughal overlords.

There were two major *bhakti* communities that played a driving force in the transformation of Braj. One was the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community from Bengal and the other was the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, founded by Caitanya's contemporary, Vallabha. This chapter of the thesis will be devoted to examining the activities of Vallabha and his successors until the late seventeenth century. Vallabha's career will be examined by outlining his philosophical system known as "Pure Non-Dualism" (*śuddhādvaitavedānta*) and then the chapter will proceed to trace Vallabha's travels, the individuals to whom he preached, and how his travels would create the basic structure for the patronage network of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.

This chapter will then proceed to trace the growth of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* under Vallabha's son, Viṭṭhalnāth, and how he and his descendants widened the patronage network of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to ensure that the community would have an enduring and influential presence in Braj. This chapter will then end with an examination of the attempts by the community to form a unique religious identity that would distinguish itself from other religious communities of that period and how this ideal vision would be challenged by internal squabbles concerning wealth and leadership authority. Thus the ultimate goal of this chapter will be to present a picture of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* within the

intellectual history of Vaiṣṇavism, within the history of Braj, and within the larger backdrop of religion and society in medieval India.

3.1 Vallabha and the Establishment of the Puṣṭi Mārga

The religious literature of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* states that the community's founder Vallabha was born in 1479 to the parents of a *brahmin* family who migrated from South India to North India. The family had settled in Varanasi where Vallabha received an education that consisted of studying major Sanskrit texts such as the *Upaniṣads*, *Vedas*, and Hindu mythological literature (*purāṇas*). It is said that upon completing his education, he began travelling across India, preaching devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and engaging in theological debates with scholars concerning Hindu scriptures. Vallabha, however, lived through some troubled times in North Indian history. He, like Nānak, Kabīr and Caitanya, lived through the destruction of the Sultanate and the instability that came as smaller regional kingdoms were established across Northern, Western, and Central India.

In his short Sanskrit text, called *Śrī Kṛṣṇāśrayaḥ*, Vallabha makes reference to the bloodshed of his time.¹ He bitterly decries the spread of barbarians and foreigners throughout the land and states that the public does nothing but lament the suffering of the good and the desecration of pilgrimage sites. The gods, Vallabha declares, have departed

¹ *Śrī Kṛṣṇāśrayaḥ* constitutes part of the *Ṣoḍaśāgranthāḥ*, a collection of sixteen small Sanskrit works written by Vallabha. The translation of the *Ṣoḍaśāgranthāḥ* used here is Redington's translation, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, mentioned in the introduction.

from their temples, the Ganges has been rendered impure, orthodox systems of learning have been replaced with a proliferation of heterodox communities, and the learned are now replaced with the ignorant. Ritual actions and religious observances are ineffectual, he continues, the caste system has disappeared, and the world is now immersed in greed, hypocrisy, and impurity. Vallabha thus states:

In lands overrun by barbarians, in places which are nothing but dens of iniquity, among people disturbed by the suffering of the good, Krishna alone is my refuge.

When the most sacred places are here, such as the Ganges, are infested with crowds of evil people - when even the deities of these places have concealed themselves - Krishna alone is my refuge.

When the sacred utterances have been lost through the lack of knowledge, and custodians fail to observe the necessary vows, and both their content and the gods invoked in them have become hidden, Krishna alone is my refuge.

When all ritual actions and religious observances have been obliterated by different doctrinal systems; and when everyone's efforts end up in hypocrisy, Krishna alone is my refuge.²

Vallabha's diagnosis of his society's ills thus led him to propound a new philosophical system that, not surprisingly, was formulated in direct opposition to the *Advaita Vedānta* of Śaṅkara which Vallabha included in a category which he called *maryādā Mārga*, or the Path of Limitations. This path referred to those religious disciplines which included Vedic sacrifices, the temple rituals carried out by priests on the behalf of devotees, and the traditional ritual worship (*pūja*) of gods and goddesses carried out in temples and private homes. This path also included, for Vallabha, the

² *Śrī Kṛṣṇāśrayaḥ*, verses, 2,3,5. See Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, see pp. 109-110.

austere practices of meditation and *yoga* associated with the ascetic's quest for union with the formless Absolute of Śaṅkara 's *Advaita Vedānta*.

There was nothing particularly wrong with this path in Vallabha's eyes. The practices associated with *maryādā Mārga* were scripturally sanctioned practices with elaborate rituals that emphasized the importance of human action in one's spiritual quest, but they were of limited value. Strict asceticism was no longer a real viable religious option for the troubled times in which he lived, nor was it a particularly desirable practice because the renouncer ran the risk of becoming proud and vain as he acquired the knowledge needed to bring about his release from the world. In a similar vein, a ritual practice such as *pūja* was of limited value for it was a set of mechanical rituals whose sole purpose was to curry favor with the Divine. Vallabha did not deny that those who adhered to the *maryādā Mārga* could achieve spiritual liberation, but it would be a liberation of a rather limited type, which usually meant complete union into the formless *brahman* as outlined by Śaṅkara. This *brahman*, as well as other deities in the Hindu pantheon, were, however, only a partial manifestation of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who for Vallabha, was the Supreme Lord out of whom emanated all of creation. Vallabha thus states:

For in one aspect the Ganges is simply water, but (in the other) it is endowed with special sacredness and grants enjoyment and liberation to those who worship it according to the law of the Path of Limitations. We should understand Brahman, too, in the same way.

Therefore the person who is on the Path of Lord Krishna, totally free from all the world, should contemplate Krishna as abiding (within him) in the ocean of His own joy.³

³ Vallabha's comments on this can be found in two texts called *Siddhāntamuktāvali* and *Puṣṭipravahamaryādabhedah* which are part of his *Ṣoḍāsagranthāḥ*. See Vallabhachārya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, pp. 27-29 and 43-45. The above quote is from verses 6-7 of *Siddhāntamuktāvali*

Vallabha thus propounded the philosophical system of Pure Non-Dualism (*Śuddhādvaita*). Vallabha rejected Śaṅkara's notion that there could be an illusory force independent of the Divine known as *māyā*, for the Supreme Absolute was pure and unalloyed and in no way could be tainted by illusion or falsity. Thus it followed for Vallabha that the world could not in anyway be deemed to be illusory for it is a manifestation of the Divine and hence real and true in every conceivable manner. Vallabha explained this by positing the doctrine of *avikṛtā-pariṇāma-vāda* or the theory that an entity can express itself as an effect without undergoing any change. Thus *brahman* manifests itself as the universe and everything in it, but does not under any circumstance undergo any change or transformation.

This is due to the two concepts of manifestation (*āvirbhāva*) and concealment (*tirobhāva*). *Brahman*, according to Vallabha, is made up of existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*), which when manifested as purely existence is inert matter. When, without any alteration to its form, the Divine considerably conceals his blissful aspect, he manifests himself as *ākṣara brahman* or Śaṅkara's formless Absolute out of which all beings or souls (*jīvas*) emerge as sparks are to a fire.⁴ When the Divine manifests himself fully as existence, consciousness, and bliss, that being is none other than the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa himself, who is defined as the supreme *brahman* or the most complete manifestation of divinity (*purnāpuruṣottam*). It is this *purnāpuruṣottam* who at his will creates the world and all the souls within it without

undergoing any sort of change whatsoever. It is for this reason that Vallabha's philosophical system has been termed as 'pure non-dualism' or also as *brahmaṇvada* because it stresses above all else the absolute unity of the Divine.

Vallabha argued that if individuals forget this fundamental truth about the identity of Kṛṣṇa and the nature of the relationship he has with all of creation, it is due to the ignorance (*avidyā*) generated out of an attachment to the desires of the material world. Vallabha states, however, that this ignorance can be removed through the receipt of divine grace (*puṣṭi*, *anugraha*) which would purify the individual and set him forth on a path of devotion shaped by the individual's complete reliance on the grace of Kṛṣṇa

Individuals who were initiated into what Vallabha named the "Path of Grace" (*Puṣṭi Mārga*) were administered the *brahmasambandha mantra*, a sacred formula which purified the individual and made him fit to enter into a loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

Individuals, however, were not required to renounce the world for the life of an ascetic. They were to lead a life following all the rules and regulations associated with their standing in the caste system. Thus Vallabha states of devotion that "The way to make this seed take firm root is to remain a householder and follow one's rule of life...Even one who is distracted should fix his mind constantly on Hari." Thus all that Vallabha required was that the devotee live a life of a householder, but he stressed that the devotee was to live a life completely dependent on the grace of Kṛṣṇa and was to

⁴ Marfatia, *The Philosophy of Vallabhācārya*, pp. 48-56.

dedicate all their future actions and material acquisitions to Kṛṣṇa before making use of them for their own use.⁵

Vallabha thus proposed that the bond between the divine and the devotee was to be maintained through the process of *seva*, which, for Vallabha, meant the dedication of one's physical labor and material wealth to the Divine by worshipping images of Kṛṣṇa.⁶ In other words, one was to work to acquire the most wonderful and highest materials possible with the intention of using them to encourage loving but totally selfless devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Thus the individual was not to perform service to Kṛṣṇa with the intent of securing a specific aim, be it spiritual or material. The practice of *seva* was to be understood as the spontaneous expression of the devotee's love for Kṛṣṇa consequently making devotion both the means and the ends of *Puṣṭi Mārga seva*. *Seva*, in other words, was to be an expression of the innate desire to serve Kṛṣṇa and to experience the joy and happiness associated with his boundless grace.

Vallabha, however, was very clear on one point. All the initiatory *mantra* did was purify the individual and spark his interest in performing *seva*, but the spiritual advancement that was to occur with the constant performance of *seva* was wholly

⁵ *Siddhāntarahasyam* is the fifth work found in Vallabha's *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*. See Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, pp. 109-124. For Vallabha's comments on the importance of maintaining the rules associated with the *varṇāśramadharmā* system see verses 18-19 of Vallabha's *Bālabodha* in Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, p. 15. Finally, see Vallabha's comments in the verses 2 and 3 of *Bhaktivardhinī* also in *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*. For these verses, see Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, p. 125. The above verse is from the second verse of *Bhaktivardhinī*. Hari is an epithet of Kṛṣṇa.

⁶ Bennett, *The Path of Grace*, pp. 69-72. Also see Vallabha's brief but nonetheless important comment on this in *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* to be found in Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, p. 26.

dependent on whether or not Kṛṣṇa's grace was upon the practitioner.⁷ According to Vallabha, those who do truly progress in their *seva*, will find their love for Kṛṣṇa maturing into a form of obsessive devotion (*vyasana*) in which the devotee's attachment to Kṛṣṇa becomes so intense that he will come to believe that there is nothing else in the world that matters outside of cultivating his selfless love for the Divine.⁸ This results, Vallabha states, in the constraint or bondage (*nirodha*) of the devotee.⁹ The passionate love cultivated by the spiritual aspirant becomes so strong that he, in turn, becomes irrevocably bound by the power of divine grace into an intensely personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

The devotee thus no longer needs to continue performing the rituals associated with *seva*. He becomes so absorbed in his single-minded love for Kṛṣṇa that he enters into a mental state where he makes the realization that ultimately everything in the world is nothing but a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa himself. The devotee will then become so completely lost in Kṛṣṇa's presence that the passionate devotion he has now cultivated continues to intensify as he alternates between states of separation and union with the Divine. One who can achieve this state of spiritual awareness, according to Vallabha, is

⁷ See *Puṣṭipravāhamaryādābhedaḥ*, verses 4-5 in Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, p. 44.

⁸ See verses 3 to 5 of *Bhaktivardhinī* in Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, pp. 125-126.

⁹ See the treatise *Nirodhalakṣaṇam* in *Śoḍaśagranthāḥ* for Vallabha's treatment of this concept. This can be found in Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, pp. 177-181.

the true spiritual renunciate, for he has foregone the world around him to be permanently bound into a relationship where he subsists on nothing more than divine grace.¹⁰

The theological structure of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was thus deliberately designed by Vallabha to be the direct opposite to the prevalent forms of Hindu religiosity, which were practiced in his time. Vallabha affirmed the value of what he called the “Path of Limitations,” but he stressed that this path was of limited spiritual value for such a path ran the risk of generating the materialism and the vanity which he saw around him. More importantly, however, those who put all their effort into following this path could only achieve a partial realization of divinity. This divinity was Śaṅkara’s formless *brahman* who was clearly subordinate to the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa who, for Vallabha, could be reached without having to adhere to a rigid form of asceticism or worship. Vallabha stressed instead that using one’s material possessions was integral in cultivating a type of devotion that thoroughly encouraged channeling one’s spontaneous feelings of love and desire wholly towards Kṛṣṇa. Thus the true renunciate was one who didn’t abandon desire, but allowed himself to be bound by it in order to develop a passionate relationship with God.

Human action, however, had nothing to do with the cultivation of that passionate love. The devotee’s spiritual progress was dependant wholly on the will of Kṛṣṇa and those few who truly progressed in their *seva* were those who were “Souls of Grace”

¹⁰ For this definition of renunciation and the importance of *viraha bhakti* in verses 7 to 21 of Vallabha’s treatise *Samṇyāsanirṇayaḥ* which is found in *Soḍaśgranthāḥ*. See Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, pp. 160-163.

(*puṣṭi jīvas*) or the true recipients of Kṛṣṇa's grace. This predestinarian nature of Vallabha's theology was very distinct in relation to the theological outlooks of his Vaiṣṇavite contemporaries and predecessors. Individuals in Vallabha's theology who are considered to be "Souls of Grace" are those for whom the seed of love (*bījabhāva*) has already been implanted in their hearts by Kṛṣṇa at the time of creation. It is these individuals who are already inclined to be devoted to the Lord and should they obscure this inclination or stray from it, Kṛṣṇa himself will put them back on the right path.

In other respects, however, Vallabha's theological perspective shared many lines of continuity with theological themes that have shaped Vaiṣṇavite *bhakti*: the themes of self-surrender, passionate devotion, and the key concept of love-in-separation (*viraha*). Vallabha stressed that liberation came from totally surrendering to Kṛṣṇa by cultivating an intimate relationship with the Lord by channeling all of one's passions and desires towards the Divine. This is what distinguished the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas paths of *bhakti* from what Vallabha called *maryādā mārga* and the Gauḍīyas called *vaidhi bhakti*. For the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, *bhakti* was not a mechanical performance of rituals, but the spontaneous expression of love that would bind the devotee into an intimate relationship with Kṛṣṇa. The ultimate result for Vallabha was a relationship in which the devotee would not merge into the Divine, but once having tasted the sweetness of divine grace, would only hunger for more. Individuals who experienced such a relationship with the Divine were rare for Vallabha, but they were truly Kṛṣṇa's chosen ones.

3.1.1 Vallabha's Travels Through India

Vallabha is said to have traveled extensively around India preaching his new religious worldview, but it is difficult to gauge the historical accuracy of the dates that sectarian literature has assigned to key events in his life. Sectarial sources all agree that Vallabha lived between 1479 and 1530 and they also agree that he undertook three preaching tours of India. The dates, however, are problematic. Sectarial histories state Vallabha's first tour was in 1492 when he was a mere thirteen years old thus making him only fourteen years old when he founded the *Puṣṭi Mārga* the following year. He then undertook two more tours of India in 1496 at the age of seventeen and finally in 1501 at the age of twenty-one.¹¹ It was during Vallabha's second trip that he was reputed to have visited the South Indian city of Vijaynagara where he was said to have caught the attention of the city's powerful ruler, Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who rewarded Vallabha's skills in debating by showering gold coins upon him and assigning him the title of "great preceptor" (*ācārya*).

The difficulty, however, is that there are no independent historical sources that can verify Vallabha's visit to Vijaynagara. The source for the story comes from a mid eighteenth century text about Vallabha's travels entitled the *Caurāṣī Baiṭhak Caritra*, a text that is concerned with establishing Vallabha as a miracle worker and as a philosopher

¹¹ For the standard dates assigned to Vallabha's travels in India, see Prabhudayāl. Mital, *Brajastha Vallabha Sampraday kā Itihās*, pp. 5-6.

extraordinaire who wins converts wherever he travels.¹² The *Caurāṣī Baiṭhak* seeks to accomplish this by drawing parallels between Vallabha and secular kings. According to the *Caurāṣī Baiṭhak*, just as the ideal Hindu king is a world-conqueror (*digvijayin*) because he asserts his political supremacy over the four corners of the earth, so too is Vallabha a *digvijayin* for he defeated rival theologians residing in sacred pilgrimage sites located in the four corners of the subcontinent. Thus in the *Caurāṣī Baiṭhak*, Vallabha is depicted as establishing the superiority of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in what Hindu scriptures deem as the four most sacred sites in India: the Eastern city of Puri, the Western city of Dvarka, the Northern cities of Badrinath and Kedarnath, and the Southern city of Rameshvaram.¹³ The Vijaynagara story only serves to emphasize the image of a triumphant Vallabha winning the subcontinent for Kṛṣṇa.

There may be, however, a certain amount of historical accuracy to the stories told in the *Caurāṣī Baiṭhak*. The *Caurāṣī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* makes it clear that Vallabha made a living by participating in theological debates at pilgrimage sites and cities that were once major sources of brahminical patronage.¹⁴ In the process, Vallabha created a following of devotees in major cities and Vaiṣṇavite pilgrimage sites stretching from

¹² *Baiṭhaks* or “seats” refer to sites in India commemorating where Vallabha had stayed during his tours and preached the tenets of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to prospective converts. Visiting the eighty-four *baiṭhaks* of Vallabha was one of the main acts of pilgrimage carried out by *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees and seems to have been established within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by the seventeenth century. The *Caurāṣī Baiṭhak Caritra* is attributed to the theologian Harirāy and for the Vijaynagara story, see Harirāy, *Baiṭhak Caritra*, story 49, pp. 215-222.

¹³ For Vallabha’s visits to these cities, see stories 34, 41, 60, 77-78 of Harirāy, *Baiṭhak Caritra*, pp. 181-184, 200-201, 235-237, 260-265.

¹⁴ The *Caurāṣī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and other sources have been discussed in the introduction along with the other principal sources for reconstructing the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.

Eastern India to Western India. In Western India, Vallabha established a following of devotees at the city of Dvarka which was said to have been founded by Kṛṣṇa himself; in Central India, he established a following of devotees around the city of Kannauj which was once a major Hindu kingdom and place of brahminical learning; in central India, Vallabha created a following of devotees in the city of Puri, the Vaiṣṇavite pilgrimage site that was also frequented by members of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇvite community; in Northern India, Vallabha established his devotee base in Mathura, Gokul, and Govardhan in the realm of Braj.

Vallabha is said to have toured Braj a total number of three times, but again the account of his travels in Braj is unreliable. The details of Vallabha's trips through Braj are found in the *Caurāṣī Baiṭhak Caritra*, but the circuit traveled by Vallabha in the text is modeled on the pilgrimage circuit of Braj followed by *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees at the time the *Caurāṣī Baiṭhak* was compiled. Sources, however, agree that Vallabha founded the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Kṛṣṇa's childhood home of Gokul. According to Vallabha himself, he was in Gokul when he was told by none other than Kṛṣṇa himself to begin the process of reminding lost souls of their relationship with the Divine. In his Sanskrit work, *Siddhāntarahasyam*, Vallabha describes how Kṛṣṇa appeared to him at midnight and personally instructed him in the *brahmasambandha* ceremony, assuring him that he would purify those souls who were initiated by Vallabha. The only condition for initiation was that they always think of the Divine and dedicate all their belongings to the Lord before making use of them for their personal needs. The following day Vallabha is said to

have initiated his close companion Dāmodārdās Harsānī into the *Puṣṭi Mārga* before setting off on his proselytizing tours in Braj and throughout India.¹⁵

Vallabha's proselytizing efforts in the Braj area met with the greatest success in the environs of the Govardhan hill where locals were habituated to worshipping a black stone image at the top of the hill even though it was not clear who the image was supposed to represent. The local cowherds worshipped the image as a snake deity while others attached to the Vaiṣṇavite ascetic Mādhavendra Puṛī worshipped it as a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. On his appearance at Govardhan, Vallabha settled the matter. He declared that it was a spontaneously manifested image of Kṛṣṇa as he looked when he lifted up the hill on his finger. The sacred image, according to Vallabha, needed to be worshipped in a formal matter and thus he converted members of the local cowherd tribes to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and taught them the appropriate rituals necessary to worship the image, which went by the name of Śrīnāthjī.¹⁶ Vallabha then continued the task of expanding the worship to Śrīnāthjī by commissioning the construction of a temple, which was to be financed by Pūrṇamal Kṣatrī, a wealthy merchant devoted to Vallabha. The foundation was laid in 1499 but the strain that the construction placed on Pūrṇamal's finances meant that the temple would be delayed until 1519 which time the locals ceased to worship the image.¹⁷ Vallabha deemed the temple to be the joint property of both Gauḍīya and *Puṣṭi Mārga*

¹⁵ For the story of Dāmodardās' initiation into the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, see Harirāy, *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, story 1, pp. 1-14.

¹⁶ The events concerning the worship of the Śrīnāthjī have been retold many times within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The earliest version of the story concerning the Vallabha's discovery of Śrīnāthjī and his conversion of the residents around Braj, see Harirāy, *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, story 73, pp. 370-379.

¹⁷ For the story of Pūrṇamal Kṣatrī, see Harirāy, *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, story 30, pp. 161-163.

devotees and both communities were to now share the worship of the image while the local residents were to supply the raw materials needed for the offerings made daily to the deity.

3.1.2 Evaluating the Importance of Vallabha's Travels

Vallabha curiously enough never chose to stay permanently near the temple that he had established for Śrīnāthjī nor did he even decide to stay permanently in Braj. Vallabha, instead, made his home with his extended family in Adel located near the pilgrimage site of Prayag. The reason for choosing Adel is not clear, but one suspects it had something to do with geographical convenience. It provided a central location which would be more conducive for his proselytizing efforts. The Sultanate collapsed into the smaller replica sultanates by the time that Vallabha was preaching and it would seem that he spent most of his time in the areas where Hindus were affected by the Sultanate's declining political fortunes. This admittedly was quite a large geographical area. Adel was right on the Yamuna and consequently made for easy access to Braj, as well as to major cities like Agra, Delhi, and Chunar. Adel also made it more accessible for Vallabha to reach Thaneshvar and Kannauj. Vallabha traveled frequently to both cities - especially Kannauj- which were major Hindu religious and political centers since the seventh century.

Vallabha's place of residence was also within easy access of important cities in central India. To the south of the Gangetic Plain was a strip of land known as Bundelkhand, which was still held by a group of Hindu chieftains known as the Candelas

who ruled from the city of Orcha where Vallabha traveled presumably again in search of potential converts among the Hindu community. Below Bundelkhand was the region of Malwa, which was now a sultanate ruled first by the Ghūrid dynasty and then the Khaljī dynasty. Vallabha traveled in Malwa and presumably sought converts from the predominantly *Advaita* leaning Śaivite community of Ujjain, the former Hindu capital of Malwa, which was still an important center of learning and pilgrimage because of the sacred Śaivite temple of Mahākāleśvar.

The situation, however, could not be more different in Gujarat where an independent sultanate was established in Vallabha's time under the Ahmad Shah dynasty. The entire Gujarat region had a long established history of Kṛṣṇaite devotion due in large part to the pilgrimage city of Dvarka, the kingdom over which Kṛṣṇa once ruled as an adult. Gujarat was admittedly some distance away from Adel, but here Vallabha did some of his most intense preaching. Vallabha extensively traveled through the Khatiawad Peninsula focussing his efforts on Dvarka, Godhara, and Junagadh, and the commercial centers of Surat, Ahmedabad, Bharuch and Cambay.

Vallabha's extensive touring meant that he could tap into a large group of potential converts who came from a wide variety of social backgrounds. In Bundelkhand and through the Gangetic Plain, for example, converts came from the socially predominant landholding castes that ranged from Bhumihar *brahmins* to *kshatriya* Rājputs, to *shudra* farming castes such as the Gujars, Ahirs, and Kurmis. It was not all that different in Gujarat either. Vallabha's devotee base came in part from the *shudra* agrarian communities like the Kunbis and Patidars. The majority of Vallabha's converts,

however, came from the affluent Hindu merchant (*vaishya*) community that was the single most dominant social group in Gujarat.¹⁸ *Vaishya* subcastes like the Bhatias, Bhansalis, Kapols, and Lohadias, were the driving force behind the subcontinent's economy from the Sultanate period well into the seventeenth century by which time emerged a series of pan-Indian mercantile networks that stretched from the Sindh through into Western India, Northern India and down into parts of the South.¹⁹ The majority of the individuals who dominated these trade routes were Gujarati merchants who were travelling throughout North and Western India dealing in usury at all levels of Indian society and engaging in a lucrative trade of food, spices, clothing, jewelry and other luxury items that came from India, South-East Asia, Africa, and Europe.

It is all but impossible, however, to determine just how large was Vallabha's following and what exactly was its social composition. The main source for the lives of Vallabha's devotees is the *Caurāṣī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* which is an account of only eighty-four of Vallabha's most exemplary devotees, but the text, however, does at least confirm that Vallabha was seeking broad based class support for his community. Thirty-nine of Vallabha's devotees are listed as *brahmins*, thirty-six are listed as members of warrior classes who were local landowners or ran businesses, five are listed as belonging

¹⁸ For a history of the *vaniya* community see, David Hardiman, *Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and Usurers in Western India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 11-42.

¹⁹ For a short history of the *vaniyā* community under the Mughals, see Douglas E. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852-1928* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 81-89. Also see Claude Markovits, "Merchant Circulation in South Asia (Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries): The Rise of Pan-Indian Merchant Networks," in *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950*, ed. Jacques Pouchepadass and Claude Markovits, Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pp. 131-162.

to the mercantile community, while six were *shudras*, the group that made up the last division of the Hindu caste system and contained artisinal groups such as blacksmiths, cloth makers, and potters. Of those eighty-four devotees, it would be a *shudra* named Kṛṣṇadās who held the all-important and prestigious position of being the first temple manager for the Śrīnāthjī temple.

Yet what was the reason for Vallabha's appeal for these social groups? There are maybe two reasons. One reason - at least in Gujarat - was the issue of social mobility. For agrarian castes, like the Kunbis and Patidars, the purity conscious and strict vegetarian lifestyle of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* gave these communities a certain respectability that they would not have otherwise enjoyed in the larger Gujarati community. Similar motives seem to be behind the mercantile support for the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. With its emphasis on a householder life grounded in strict vegetarianism, simplicity, restraint, and frugality, membership in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* conferred upon members of the mercantile community the status of *brahmins* in Gujarati society.²⁰ This newly adopted status in turn allowed them the opportunity to display their riches by dedicating their wealth for the *seva* of

²⁰ The relationship between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and social mobility has been made by a number of different authors. Rachel Dwyer has made this point in her article Rachel Dwyer, "Caste, Religion, and Sect in Gujarat: Followers of Vallabhacharya and Swaminarayan," in *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, ed. Roger Ballard (Delhi: B.R. Publications, 1996), pp. 174-175 as well as Richard J. Cohen in his Richard J Cohen, "Sectarian Vaishnavism: The Vallabha Samprādaya," in *Identity and Division in Cults in South Asia*, eds. David Utz and Peter Gaeffke (Philadelphia: Department of South Asia Regional Studies, 1984), pp. 65-72. N.A. Thooti makes a similar point in his study of Gujarati Vaiṣṇavas. He notes that it is explicitly stated in Gujarati culture that embracing Vaiṣṇavism and other religious communities is key to rising upwards in Gujarati society. See N.A. Thooti, *The Vaishnavas of Gujarat* (Bombay: Longsman Green, and Co, 1935), pp. 131-133. Also see Telivala, *Śuddhādvaita Brahmāvada*, pp. 107-122.

Kṛṣṇa, and helped to cultivate the image of merchants as pious individuals who used their wealth for the loving service of the Lord.

The second possible reason for the viability of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* may simply be that, for certain segments of Hindu society, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* presented a socially conservative religious solution to the uncertainty they associated with proliferation of Muslim sultanates. The social groups that Vallabha had attracted into his fold were very dependant on societal and political stability for their economic survival particularly the mercantile communities who had made their fortunes by actively building ties with Hindu and Muslim authorities. Rocking the political order never made sense to mercantile communities given how dependent they were on its stability for maintaining their livelihoods. The teachings of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* did not add to the social upheaval of the times by calling for any sort of violent political and social action or for the radical religious action of the *Sants*.

Vallabha, instead, affirmed and encompassed competing religious worldviews and social groups within a philosophical framework that reinterpreted key religious concepts and practices within Hinduism. Thus, in Vallabha's worldview, the religious practices that fell under his rubric of the *maryāda Mārga* were affirmed, but the validity of the practices were stressed as being of limited spiritual value for the time in which he lived. The alternative was one that instead stressed the importance of leading a regular householder life that was grounded in a single-minded devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Thus Vallabha, in turn, affirmed the pursuit of the four *puruṣārthas* of classical Hindu texts. The pursuit of desire (*kāma*) and wealth (*artha*) were encouraged by Vallabha as long as it was within

the framework of a new Vaiṣṇava *dharma* that required *artha* and *kāma* to be directed towards the pursuit of a new definition of liberation (*mokṣa*). This form of liberation was not absorption into a formless Divine, but, rather, a state in which one constantly experienced Kṛṣṇa's divine presence.²¹

The *varṇāśramadharmā* system was thus affirmed, not rejected, within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Vallabha permitted the fulfillment of worldly obligations and the preservation of the *varṇāśramadharmā* system as long as one's worldly obligations did not become an insurmountable obstacle to one's journey on the Path of Grace. Vallabha, however, did deviate from the traditional caste system in one respect by stressing that devotees were no longer dependent on the intermediary position of a *brahmin* priest. All individuals were now empowered as members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to further their spiritual growth in the privacy of their own homes by placing their reliance solely on Kṛṣṇa..

Thus, within Vallabha's religious ideology, though devotees might be unequal in the worldly realm, they were spiritually equal, for all devotees traversed the same spiritual path empowered by Kṛṣṇa's grace. This is precisely why Vallabha emphasized the dangers of turning away from the doctrines of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Practicing any ritual that slightly deviated from *Puṣṭi Mārga* doctrine—especially the *maryādā mārga*— would comprise the one thing that made the *Puṣṭi Mārga* unique amongst all other religious communities around them: the fact that they were a closely-knit community of spiritual

²¹ Vallabha redefines the meaning of the *puruṣārthas* most succinctly in *Soḍasagranthāḥ* in the four stanza treatise entitled *Catuḥśloki*. The text can be found in Vallabhacharya *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, p. 118.

elect who, being infused with divine grace, desired nothing else but to love the form of Lord Kṛṣṇa. “Therefore, Vallabha states, the souls on the Path of Grace are distinct, no doubt. For they were created in order to worship the Blessed Lord’s very person, and for nothing else.”²²

Thus this well-knit community that Vallabha created was not one that was dominated by the upper echelons of Hindu society. Vallabha sought and – if the *Caurāṣī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* is any indication – enjoyed broad based class support throughout parts of North and Western India because the type of religious householder ideal that he espoused was more suitable as a model for an individual’s religious life. Part of his membership was drawn from people who were tied to the land, working as landowners, or in artisinal and agricultural occupations such as shoemaking, weaving, or foundry. Another and very large part of *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees were from the very affluent business community dominated by Gujarati merchants who created a business network that connected the principal commercial and urban centers of Mughal India to foreign markets overseas.

Thus the *Puṣṭi Mārga* found itself integrated into the larger economic framework of medieval India. Mercantile members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* community crisscrossed the major trade routes of Northern and Western India ensuring that major centers of *Puṣṭi Mārga* Vaiṣṇavism in or near major urban and pilgrimage areas such as Surat, Ahmedabad, Ujjain, Prayag, Varanasi, Delhi, and Braj would have a steady income and

²² Vallabha makes this point most emphatically in verses 10-12 and 17-21 of *Puṣṭipravāhamaryādābhedaḥ*, See Vallabhacharya, *The Grace of Lord Krishna*, pp. 44, 47.

source of raw materials to support their religious activities. Thus Vallabha had succeeded in laying down the basic foundation for the patronage network of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by establishing ties with a wealthy mercantile community whose affluence guaranteed the financial well-being of his community.

3.2 The Ascendancy of Viṭṭhalaṇāth to the Leadership of the Puṣṭi Mārga

Vallabha had died in 1530 leaving an impressive legacy to his successors. He had established a religious community that was founded upon a sophisticated religious system, which he had outlined in numerous Sanskrit texts and commentaries. He established the Śrīnāthjī temple as the central place of pilgrimage for the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and he left through parts of India a following of largely wealthy devotees whose patronage would become the financial backbone of his community. The task of furthering the interests of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* now fell upon the shoulders of Vallabha's eldest son, Gopīnāth (1512-1542). Gopīnāth engaged in successful fundraising efforts for the community and brought large amounts of money and wealth to be used for the upkeep of Vallabha's descendants and for the worship of Śrīnāthjī in Govardhan. He also had a reputation as a fine scholar and theologian whose works, with the exception of one text known as *Sādhānā Dipikā*, are now lost. Nonetheless, Gopīnāth seems to have been overshadowed by his younger and more charismatic brother Viṭṭhalaṇāth (1515-1585). The *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārta*, compiled well after the death of Gopīnāth in 1542, presents Gopīnāth as being an ineffectual leader in comparison to his younger brother.

Devotees are sent to Viṭṭhalnāth for instruction in *Puṣṭi Mārga* rituals, for Gopīnāth's initiates and the images they worship are considered to be unfit for membership of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*,

It is, however, difficult to judge the historical accuracy of the image of Gopīnāth portrayed in *Puṣṭi Mārga* hagiography given that partisans of Viṭṭhalnāth wrote the texts and their commentaries. What seems to be lying behind this vitriol is a sense of frustration over Gopīnāth's lack of interest in the daily activities of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Gopīnāth was committed to his father's community, but he was uninvolved in the day-to-day running of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* because of his fundraising trips and his frequent visits to the Vaiṣṇavite pilgrimage site of Puri. Puri was the site of the famous Jagannāth temple where temple rites followed what Vallabha had called the *maryādā Mārga*. It would also seem that many of Gopīnāth's initiates still practised traditional Hindu temple rituals rejected by Vallabha and it is for these reasons that Gopīnāth's followers were labeled not as followers of the "Path of Grace," but as practitioners of conventional Hindu temple traditions.²³ The association made between Gopīnāth and the followers of the *maryādā*

²³ In story 20 of the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, which deals with the life of Prabhudās Jalōṭa, we find Gopīnāth associating with Rāmdās Kṣatri who would do worship to Kṛṣṇa not according to the rituals of the *Puṣṭi Mārgā*, but according to the regulations of Hindu temple worship which Vallabha deemed of limited value. This image of Gopīnāth is reinforced in story 17 of the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* that deals with the life of Devikapur Kṣatri, who was initiated by Gopīnāth, but again practiced the rituals associated with Hindu temple rituals. Thus the *seva* performed by children of Devakapur was of no real value because it was not done according to the rituals of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. A similar theme is again developed in Harirāy's commentary on the life of Nārāyaṇdās Bhaṭṭ in the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* where Gopīnāth's initiation of Nārāyaṇdās into the *Puṣṭi Mārga* is of limited value because of Gopīnāth's alleged predilection towards traditional Hindu rituals. In the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, Harirāy is not very kind at all to Gopīnāth and goes as far as to imply that Gopīnāth's predilection towards rituals not followed by the *Puṣṭi Mārgā* was the reason that his lineage died out with the premature death of his son, Puruṣottam. Harirāy's comments are

Mārgā seems to have contributed to their later vilification in *Puṣṭi Mārga* texts and to Viṭṭhalnāth's position as *de facto* head of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in 1542.

3.2.1 The Growth of the Puṣṭi Mārgā Under Viṭṭhalnāth

The ascent of Viṭṭhalnāth marked an important turning point in the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* for his tenure as the head of his father's community marked the beginning of an expansion process that would establish the *Puṣṭi Mārga* as a major presence in Braj. The first step in this expansion process had actually taken place during the tenure of Gopīnāth when the *Puṣṭi Mārga* had succeeded in wresting control of the Śrīnāthjī temple from the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas in 1540, thus establishing their full authority over the shrine.²⁴ Shortly afterwards, Viṭṭhalnāth had begun the first in a series of six fundraising tours that centered primarily in the Kathiawad area of Gujarat. The first of Viṭṭhalnāth's tours to Gujarat took place in 1543 C.E. and the remaining five tours took place between 1559 and 1581 C.E. when the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was firmly under the guidance of

contained in the appendix to story 3 (*laumḍī kī vārtā*) of the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* that deals with the life of Dāmodardās Sambhalavāre. See Harirāy, *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, p. 39.

Also see the story of Prabhudās Jalōṭa, in Harirāy, *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, pp. 140-141. For the story of Devākapur Kṣatri, see story 17, pp. 130-131 and story 57, pp. 326-327 for the *vārtā* of Nārāyaṇās Bhaṭṭ. There is also reference to Gopīnāth in the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*. It is here where Gopīnāth is deemed the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa's younger brother who was the protector of the *maryādā Mārgā*. See Hariray, *Do Sau Bavan Vaishnavan Ki Varta*, 3 vols. Indore: Vaishnav Mitra Mandal, 1992. vol. 1, story 1, p. 4.

²⁴ For the discussion of the dates and the length of the dispute between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the Gauḍīyas, see Mital, *Brajstha Vallabha Sampradāy kā Itihās*, pp. 38-39.

Viṭṭhalnāth's leadership.²⁵ Viṭṭhalnāth traveled again almost primarily in the Kathiawad peninsula of Gujarat where he focussed on building his father's devotee base in Dvarka, the port cities of Surat and Cambay, and the cities of Ahmadabad and Godhra, where he initiated disciples into the community.

Viṭṭhalnāth, however, deviated from his father in one respect: he allowed other devotees to initiate converts into the community on his behalf. With the exception of his closest companion and very first initiate, Dāmodardās Harsānī, there is no indication that Vallabha gave the power to other individuals initiate potential devotees. Viṭṭhalnāth certainly initiated individuals personally into the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, but in his absence he gave the right to certain devotees to spearhead preaching efforts and to initiate devotees on his behalf. A prominent government minister for Gujarat named Nāgājī Bhaṭṭ was in charge of proselytizing activities centered in the city of Godhra; in the vicinity of Ahmadabad, Bhaila Koṭhārī was in charge of proselytizing activities while Cācā Harivaṃśa, Viṭṭhalnāth's most trusted disciple, traveled throughout Gujarat preaching and shopping for goods to be used in temple services in Gujarat and in Braj.²⁶ The results of these efforts were spectacular. Viṭṭhalnāth succeeded in winning over large numbers of individuals from the Gujarati mercantile population and from the lower caste communities of Kunbis and Patidars who were engaged in farming and agriculture.

²⁵ The dates given for Viṭṭhalnāth's trips can be found in Śaṣṭrī, *Kāṃkārōṭī kā Itihāsa*, part 1, p. 66. The dates for his trips are 1543, 1559, 1562, 1569, 1574, 1581.

²⁶ See Harirāy, *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan ki Vārtā*, vol. 1 for the stories of these key disciples. The story of Nāgājī Bhaṭṭ is found in story 1, the story of Cācā Harivaṃśa is found in story 3 while the story of Bhaila Koṭhārī is found in story 10. See pages 1-25, pp. 60-94, 143-152.

Viṭṭhalnāth had succeeded in ensuring the permanent presence of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Gujarat by not only securing the perpetual support of the state's artisinal, farming, and mercantile community, but by securing the support of the region's prominent political officials.

The targeting of the political community was something rather new in the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. It is certain that Vallabha was travelling in major political centers during the course of his travels, but, with the exception of his alleged encounter with Kṛṣṇadevarāya at Vijaynagara, there is no explicit reference in the literature of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* that links Vallabha to the patronage of any one politically prominent Hindu. Viṭṭhalnāth, however, would set a new precedent in the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* with his conversion of political officials in Gujarat, his connections with a minor Hindu ruler in Central India named Rāmcandra Vaghela, and with his efforts in securing the patronage, in 1562, of Rānī Durgāvāṭī, the Hindu queen of Gondwana, famed for her fierce opposition to the Mughals. Durgāvāṭī had arranged Viṭṭhalnāth's second marriage and gifted him tracts of land, which included the construction of a large residence in Mathura for Viṭṭhalnāth, his wife, and eleven children.²⁷

Viṭṭhalnāth would continue to seek royal patronage, but in a larger fashion after 1570 when he moved with his family from Mathura to Gokul, where his father had

²⁷ The details surrounding Durgāvāṭī and Viṭṭhalnāth are found in a seventeenth century *Braj Bhāṣa* text attributed to Gokulnāth called *Bhāvsindhu kī vārtā*. The edition used is *Bhāvsindhu kī Vārtā*, (Śrī Govardhan Granthamālā Karyalāy), pp. 254-267.

founded the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Several years after settling in Gokul, Viṭṭhalnāth began to approach Mughal officials directly for land grants to gain proprietary rights over the lands surrounding Gokul and the Śrīnāthjī temple. The manner in which Viṭṭhalnāth went about approaching Mughal officials is, however, not exactly clear. There is no mention in sectarian literature that Viṭṭhalnāth directly approached prominent Rājput noblemen in the Mughal court to secure his desire for land ownership in Braj nor is there any means of substantiating sectarian claims that Viṭṭhalnāth directly met with the then Mughal emperor Akbar in the environs of Braj. There are no historical sources outside the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to confirm any meetings between Akbar and Viṭṭhalnāth and, when taken on their own, the stories surrounding Viṭṭhalnāth and Akbar are designed to underline the superiority of Viṭṭhalnāth's spiritual authority over the mighty secular authority of the Mughal emperor.

This does not mean that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* during the reign of Viṭṭhalnāth had no contact whatsoever with Mughal authorities. It may very well have. Alīkhān Pathān, the Muslim governor of the Gokul area, who is stated to have had ties with Viṭṭhalnāth, was also known to have been involved with land dealings with members of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavite community.²⁸ The names of Akbar's mother and one of his close officials on certain land grants issued to Viṭṭhalnāth suggest that the community had some close ties within the court that have been left unrecorded in sectarian literature. What is probable,

²⁸ For the details about the ties between the *Puṣṭi Mārgā* and Alīkhān, see Harirāy, *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan ki Vārtā*, vol. 1, story 37, pp. 291-305. For Alīkhān and the Gauḍīyas, see Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 166.

however, is that even if there is again no documentation, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would almost certainly have had to apply for land tenure rights by petitioning the royal court via the local ecclesiastical officer like all other religious communities at the time would have done as well. The extent to which the petitioning process was accelerated by the aid of contacts inside the royal entourage or through the influence of Viṭṭhalnāth's mercantile patrons at court, for the time being can only be unknown.

What is most certain, however, is that Viṭṭhalnāth was incredibly successful in obtaining land grants securing him tenurial rights around areas of *Puṣṭi Mārga* activity in the Braj area. The first of these grants, dated to 1577, was issued in the name of the Emperor Akbar and promised that Viṭṭhalnāth and his family would be exempted from taxation and that their temples and landholdings in Gokul would be assured state protection from the Mughals.²⁹ Four years later, in 1581, another edict was issued to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* that allowed the cows kept by the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to roam freely and unharmed not only throughout the village of Gokul, but through state-owned property (*kalisa*) and through estates (*jāgīrs*) owned by Mughal noblemen.³⁰

The same year another edict was issued in the name of Akbar's mother, Hamida Banu, that the cows owned by the *Puṣṭi Mārga* could roam freely in the lands of Braj without harassment. Seven years later in 1588, yet another edict was issued in the name of a Mughal official named Bahadur Khan, reiterating again the right of the cows owned

²⁹ For the reproduction of this edict, see Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroḥi kā Itihāsa*, part 1, pp. 104-105.

³⁰ For a reproduction of this grant, see Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroḥi kā Itihāsa*, part 1, p. 105.

by the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to roam freely through lands in Braj. The grant went on to state explicitly that the cows were not to be bothered or harassed by imperial officials on the pretext of supervising the herding of the cows or counting them for the purpose of taxation.³¹ These last two grants do seem insignificant, but again are indicative of the fact that some sort of fairly close relationship was developing between the Mughal court and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* that was assuring the community protection and support from the state. In return for state patronage, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* had to do what was required of other communities who received state support: they were to continually pray for the well being of the empire.³²

Praying for the well being of the empire did not, however, detract Viṭṭhalnāth in any way from continuing efforts to expand the influence of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Running parallel to these efforts to acquire rights of land tenure from the Mughals, he had begun construction projects in 1570 and 1581.³³ Viṭṭhalnāth had a series of eight private

³¹ See Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroḥi kā Itihās*, part 1, p. 105.

³² This is the stipulation of the first grant given in 1577 to the *Puṣṭi Mārgā* by the Mughals. The following is a translation of the 1577 grant from Śāstrī's *Kāṃkāroḥi kā Itihās*, part 1, p. 105. The translation is mine:

Royal Edict 1 in connection with the residents of Gokul

The edict of the great sovereign Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar

The Emperor Akbar, the protector of the entire world and other government servants will neither bother nor ask anything of Vitthaldās [Viṭṭhalnāth] who, residing in Gokul with his friends, is undoubtedly our well wisher. He must be allowed to live in his home without any worry so he may pray for our continual glory and well being. Government officials must follow what is written and should not do anything to the contrary.

Written in the second month, the 29th day, the year 985; Sukravar 13 of September in the Christian year 1577; Vikram Samvat 1634.

³³ For a lengthy description of Viṭṭhalnāth's innovations in the rituals of the *Puṣṭi Mārgā*, see Mital, *Brajstha Vallabha Sampradāy kā Itihās*, pp. 52-59.

residences constructed for himself and his seven sons, which also acted as private shrines for deities held in the custody of the family. An extension to the Śrīnāthjī temple was also built to serve as a bedroom for the deity after evening services.³⁴ This was followed by some major changes to the liturgical practices within the Śrīnāthjī temple. Worship during the time of Vallabha seems to have been a relatively simple affair that consisted in the offering of food and flowers to the image. Viṭṭhalnāth, however, was intent on transforming the worship into a deeply aesthetic experience for his devotees that was meant to further their own practice of *seva* by aiding them in the visualization of Kṛṣṇa's divine pastimes.

Viṭṭhalnāth accomplished this by introducing a set of elaborate rituals that sought to recreate a day in the life of Kṛṣṇa. The deity was awakened in the morning, clothed in expensive outfits and jewelry, offered perfumes, fed large meals, and finally put to bed in the evening. Elaborate paintings of Kṛṣṇa's life were used as backdrops to aid in the recreation of Kṛṣṇa's day, and devotional poetry in praise of Kṛṣṇa was sung according to the rules of Indian classical music. Elaborate festivals were added to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* calendar in order to glorify further Śrīnāthjī's presence in Braj. That presence was celebrated not only through temple rituals, but also through Viṭṭhalnāth's three tours of Braj, which occurred in 1543, 1567, and 1571.³⁵ It was on these travels that Viṭṭhalnāth marked the areas where his father traveled as well as the sites of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Thus, just as the Gauḍīyas had their own sacred geography of Braj which was articulated

³⁴ Mital, *Brajstha Vallabha Sampradāy kā Itihās*, p. 47.

through the *ban yātrā*, so too did Viṭṭhalnāth create his own version of the *ban yātrā* which was now to represent the standard pilgrimage circuit in Braj for the devotees of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.

The *Puṣṭi Mārga ban yātrā* and the elaboration of *Puṣṭi Mārga* worship did not, however, constitute the final step in Viṭṭhalnāth's transformation of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The final form of expansion under Viṭṭhalnāth was to ensure that the control of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and its vast resources would stay in the hands of his descendants. Thus, before his death in 1585, Viṭṭhalnāth divided the spiritual leadership of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* equally amongst his seven sons, who inherited the exclusive right to initiate disciples into the community.³⁶ Viṭṭhalnāth's sons were also given custody over various images of Kṛṣṇa with the principal image of Śrīnāthjī being entrusted to the hands of Viṭṭhalnāth's eldest son and his male descendants. This distribution of spiritual authority led to the formation of the seven divisions within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* known as the "Seven Houses."

The heads of each house were now called *mahārājas* with the special designation of *tilkāyat* given to the lineage holder who had custody of the Śrīnāthjī image. All the *mahārājas* and their extended families were, nonetheless, to have equal access to performing *seva* to Śrīnāthjī, but otherwise the *mahārāja* of each house, along with his extended family, had full control over internal administration of his shrine. It was made

³⁵ Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 164.

³⁶ For the reorganization of the *Puṣṭi Mārgā* by Viṭṭhalnāth, see Mital, *Brajstha Vallabha Sampradāy kā Itihās*, pp. 64-65.

very clear, however, that spiritual authority within the community was now to be passed down according to the principle of primogeniture: the leadership of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* could only be held by Vallabha's male descendants as traced through Viṭṭhalnāth. This, in turn, meant that now only the *mahārājas* had exclusive rights to initiate individuals into the community. This division of authority by Viṭṭhalnāth constituted his final reform of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and, in turn, established what would come to be known as the "family of Vallabha" (*vallabhkul*) or perhaps more appropriately, the "Vallabha dynasty" (*vallabhvaṃśa*).

3.3 The Continued Expansion of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*: 1585 to 1670 C.E

The *mahārājas* who came after Viṭṭhalnāth continued the process of expanding the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s influence in Braj. Expansion continued around the Śrīnāthji temple after Viṭṭhalrāy, the grandson of Viṭṭhalnāth, purchased land around Govardhan and secured a royal grant in 1593 that not only acknowledged the land purchases, but their exemption from any form of taxation.³⁷ The same year the *Puṣṭi Mārga* secured yet another grant that marked an important turning point in their expansion efforts. The grazing rites given to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Gokul were now modified so the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* and their descendants became the sole owners of all the land in Gokul. The land was to be exempted from taxation by Mughal officers, and it was to be held in perpetuity by the

³⁷ For a reproduction of this edict, see Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage" p. 48.

Puṣṭi Mārga who were to use the income gained from their landholdings to help defray the costs of performing worship in the Śrīnāthjī temple at Govardhan.³⁸

This right was confirmed by two imperial edicts issued to Viṭṭhalrāy in 1633 and 1643 by Shāhjahān, who acknowledged the *mahārājas* of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* as well-wishers of the Mughal empire who held the right to possess complete ownership of Gokul and other landholdings of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Braj.³⁹ Landholdings, however, soon came not only to encompass Gokul and areas in the vicinity of the Śrīnāthjī temple. In 1658, two edicts were issued yet again in the name of Shāhjahān's son, Dāra Shikūh. Grazing rights were given to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in two villages outside Mathura named Gopalpur and Bacchagaon, and this was followed by yet another edict that gifted the whole district of Mahaban as rent-free land to Giridharlāl, Viṭṭhalrāy's grandson.⁴⁰

3.3.1 The *Puṣṭi Mārga* from 1585 to 1670 - Formation of Community Identity

In the midst of these continued expansion plans, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* also seemed to be focussing on consolidating itself by trying to make efforts to sharpen its identity as a unique religious community among its counterparts in Braj and on the North Indian devotional scene. This, in part, meant focussing on trying to popularize the teachings of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* through the more popular medium of *Braj Bhāṣa*. Up to the mid-

³⁸ Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage," p. 49.

³⁹ Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage," pp. 48-50.

⁴⁰ Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage," pp. 51-53.

seventeenth century, the vast majority of the theological treatises produced within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was in Sanskrit, but this underwent a major change under the direction of Gokulnāth, Viṭṭhalnāth's fourth son who would eventually become revered as one of the most prominent theologians in the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. It was Gokulnāth who supervised, towards the end of the sixteenth century, the *vārtā* literature which dealt with the lives of Vallabha and his disciples. The *vārtā* literature, however, was not the only major theological work written in *Braj Bhāṣa*. In 1643, a *Braj Bhāṣa* commentary was written on the Sanskrit text, *Śikṣāpatra*, and then towards the end of the seventeenth century, *Braj Bhāṣa* commentaries were added to the *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* by Gokulnāth's nephew, Harirāy.⁴¹

None of these works said anything terribly new. They all re-emphasized the theme, albeit in a more accessible manner, key components of Vallabha's theological system and how these values gave the *Puṣṭi Mārga* an identity that was distinct from their other religious counterparts. This was certainly true in the case of a series of discourses by Gokulnāth that was compiled by disciple, Kalyāṇ Bhaṭṭ, under the title of *Śrī Gokulnāthjī ke caubīs vacanāmṛta* or the "Twenty-four Nectarean Utterances of

⁴¹ *Śikṣāpatra* or "Letters of Instruction" were forty-one letters of religious instruction written by Harirāy to console his brother, Gopeshvar, who was grieving over the sudden death of his wife. The *Śikṣāpatra* was written in Sanskrit but it was Gopeshvar who wrote commentaries in *Braj Bhāṣa* as he received each of his brother's letters. For the most recently published edition of the *Śikṣāpatra*, see Harirāy, *Iktāṁś Baḍe Śikṣāpatra* (Indore: Vaiṣṇav Mitr Maṇḍal, 1999).

Gokulnāth.”⁴² It was in these discourses that Gokulnāth sought to answer the concerns of devotees by detailing the characteristics of the ideal *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotee. Thus the *vacanāmṛta* reiterates Vallabha’s teachings concerning the performance of service to Kṛṣṇa and what it means to be the Lord’s servant. The *vacanāmṛta* constantly stresses that one need not renounce all worldly actions, but rather the fruits of one’s actions through the practice of selfless service to Kṛṣṇa.⁴³ Service is defined in the *vacanāmṛta* as pleasing the Lord with the best and highest offerings possible and developing one’s culinary abilities in order to offer Kṛṣṇa the most delectable offerings that one could possibly create. It is not surprising then that the *vacanāmṛta* gives a lengthy description of what type of clothing, jewelry, and foods are to be offered to Kṛṣṇa. It is equally unsurprising that the *vacanāmṛta* stresses the importance of casting aside all worldly thoughts when performing what is to be the single-minded worship to the Lord.⁴⁴

Performing true service to Kṛṣṇa, however, does not only require certain single-mindedness and commitment, for the *vacanāmṛta* repeatedly stresses the importance of humility as the cardinal virtue of a true devotee. A good community member never looks at the faults of other devotees; he is pure in mind; he is humble, patient in times of suffering, and never seeks to advertise his sectarian affiliations. *Puṣṭi Mārga* worship, the *vacanāmṛta* stresses, should be performed privately and humbly at home with the purpose of pleasing the Lord, serving other devotees, and serving one’s *guru*. It is the *guru*,

⁴² The edition of the that is being used here is found in Bhāgavatī Prasād Devapurā, ed, *Gosvāmi Gokulnāth Smṛti Granth* (Nāthdvāra: Nāthdvāra Sāhitya Maṇḍal, 1996), pp. 57-73.

⁴³ See utterances 10, 12, and 14 for examples of this theme in the *Vacanāmṛta*

according to the *vacanāmṛta*, that infuses the individual with the grace of God so that the devotee may begin his path towards reconciliation with the Divine.⁴⁵

This emphasis on devotees as the receptacles of divine grace explains why the *vacanāmṛta* repeatedly insists that devotees refrain from keeping contact with individuals who are not initiates of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Any form of contact with non-devotees could serve not only to compromise the state of purity that devotees attain as initiates into the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, but also could have the potential to lead devotees down alternate forms of religiosity that would be detrimental to their religious growth. The act of turning away from the community - labeled as *anyāśraya* in the *vacanāmṛta* - does not only mean to forsake the *Puṣṭi Mārga* for another religious path. It also extends to viewing or keeping an image that is not a consecrated *Puṣṭi Mārga* image, going on pilgrimages to sites not associated with Kṛṣṇa or the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, and using goods for service that have been touched by non-members. The *vacanāmṛta* thus stresses that devotees should exert great care in all of their actions so their purity and relationship with Kṛṣṇa is not compromised.⁴⁶

The repeated warning concerning the danger of *anyāśraya* makes it understandable why the *vacanāmṛta* places emphasis on the concept of *satsang* or “association with devotees.” Meeting with other initiated members on a regular basis for the sharing of

⁴⁴ See utterances 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, and 24 for examples of this theme.

⁴⁵ For these two themes in the *vacanāmṛta*, see utterances 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 17, and 21.

⁴⁶ For the dangers of *anyāśraya*, see utterances 1, 4, 12, 16, and 24.

consecrated food and discussions of religious topics had the purpose of fostering and promoting solidarity within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* community. It is through the constant association with other devotees that Kṛṣṇa is most pleased and, consequently, makes his presence felt in those devotees who are constantly engaged in discussing his glories. This emphasis on *satsang* was particularly important to those individuals within the mercantile community who had to travel constantly or live in foreign lands. The *vacanāmṛta* stresses that for them it is especially important that they avoid contact with individuals outside the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and instead seek out the company of *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees who could provide them with spiritual support and thus make them feel closer to Kṛṣṇa.⁴⁷

Thus the overwhelming concern of the *vacanāmṛta* is to create a close-knit community of believers who, being infused with the divine grace of Kṛṣṇa, manifest nothing but selfless love for Kṛṣṇa in every single one of their thoughts and deeds. Individuals express this love and devotion by working in their daily lives towards acquiring the most lavish and highest quality gifts so they can minister out of great love and devotion to the image of Kṛṣṇa installed in a sectarian shrine. The act of service in the *vacanāmṛta* was not only for the greater glory of Kṛṣṇa, but also was meant to create the awareness among devotees that, since community members were infused with grace of the Divine, they had a responsibility to maintain the overall well-being of their community by serving fellow devotees and supporting their spiritual pursuits.

⁴⁷ See utterances 6,11,15,16,19, 21, and 24.

Gokulnāth's *vacanāmṛta* was thus very much an amplification of Vallabha's teachings about the importance of reliance on divine grace, the regular performance of *seva*, and the importance of affirming caste regulations in order to maintain the distinctive religious identity of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Thus the emphasis in the *vacanāmṛta* was placed on fostering among devotees a sense of uniqueness that brought them together as a close-knit, self-sufficient, but rather exclusive community for whom purity would be a central concern.

3.4 Disputes Within The Puṣṭi Mārga

This ideal world envisioned by the *vacanāmṛta* was hardly reflected in reality. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the stability of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was shaken by disputes over the possession of wealth and the wielding of authority within the community, which were not new issues in the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The power struggle that occurred after Vallabha's death between the Gauḍīyas and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* for control of the Śrīnāthjī temple came to an end when the *Puṣṭi Mārga* finally displaced their rivals by burning down their homes and then quickly resorting to lobbying Mughal officials in Delhi to recognize their exclusive claims over ownership of the temple.⁴⁸ A similar type of power struggle within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* occurred after the death of Gopīnāth in 1542. Upon the death of his older brother, Viṭṭhalnāth assumed leadership of the community since Gopīnāth's son and successor, Puruṣottam, was still a young child.

⁴⁸ See Harirāy, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, story 84, episode 2, pp. 573-585.

Six years later, however, Viṭṭhalnāth found himself embroiled in a leadership dispute with Puruṣottam's family who challenged Viṭṭhalnāth's right to lead the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.⁴⁹

Puruṣottam's family had considerable support behind them in Kṛṣṇadās, the Gujarati disciple of Vallabha whose flamboyancy was indicative of how membership in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* could allow even a humble *śudra* to gain a certain amount of prominence in the society around him. Kṛṣṇadās held the prestigious distinction of having his spiritual teacher, Vallabha, appointing him as the first temple manager of the Śrīnāthjī temple. His position was such that he became extremely well known for travelling using a chariot followed by a large retinue of attendants and had come to develop something of a reputation for cultivating relationships with women that caused controversy within the community. Kṛṣṇadās had found himself in a difficult position when a prostitute he had brought into the temple died while singing to Śrīnāthjī a devotional composition taught to her by Kṛṣṇadās himself. Kṛṣṇadās dispensed of the problem by paying restitution to the prostitute's family and quickly got them out of the temple. Kṛṣṇadās would eventually find himself in a similar situation when he began to start an affair with a wealthy *kṣatriya* woman who was given permission to be present while food offerings were being privately made to Śrīnāthjī.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The leadership drama that occurred within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* is detailed in Harirāy, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, Story 84, episode 7, pp. 596-608.

⁵⁰ The events surrounding Kṛṣṇadās' controversial relationship with these women, see story 84 of Harirāy, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, episodes 5 and 7, pp. 590-94, 596-607.

It was this incident that prompted Kṛṣṇadās to side against Viṭṭhalnāth in the succession dispute for control of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The presence of the woman at the time of the food offerings was ritually prohibited for food could only be offered by temple servants to the image and the apparent gossip-mongering over the continued privileges accorded to the woman had angered Viṭṭhalnāth enough to have the woman banned from the temple. Kṛṣṇadās decided to spite his *guru*'s son and attempted to end Viṭṭhalnāth's bid for power by banishing him from the Śrīnāthjī temple for six months. Kṛṣṇadās refused to desist until Viṭṭhalnāth's eldest son went to the local Mughal authorities and had Kṛṣṇadās imprisoned for insulting his father. Viṭṭhalnāth, however, protested his son's actions and went on a hunger strike until the Mughal authorities freed the individual who, regardless of his actions, was still a disciple of Vallabha himself. Kṛṣṇadās was reappointed as temple manager, old grudges were forgotten, and Viṭṭhalnāth was recognized as the head of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.⁵¹

A similar set of events would occur within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in the seventeenth century. All seven *mahārājas* found themselves disputing who had the rights to perform the daily worship of Śrīnāthjī. According to the division of authority within the community, all *mahārājas* had equal rights in worshipping Śrīnāthjī since he was the principal image of the community that was manifested to none other than Vallabha himself. Disputes arose within the community for the image was under the custody of the first house, whose *mahārājas* used their special designation as *tilkāyat* to assert their full

⁵¹ See episode Harirāy, *Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārṭā*, episode 7, pp. 590-610.

control over it at the expense of the remaining six lineage holders within the community. This was precisely the problem during the reign of Shāhjahān. The land grants issued to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by the Mughals acknowledged the *mahārājas* of the first house as having precedence over the other houses of the community because of their positions as *tilkāyats* who had custody of the Śrīnāthjī image. When the first house found its authority challenged, the then *tilkāyat*, Viṭṭhalrāy (1601-1655), appealed to the emperor for assistance. Shāhjahān ultimately sided with him and used imperial authority to enforce the authority of the first house over the remaining lineage holders within the community.⁵²

Another similar set of circumstances would also befall the third house of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* that would continue throughout the seventeenth century.⁵³ In the early decades of the seventeenth century, the members of the third house found themselves embroiled in a long and lengthy dispute with members of the sixth house concerning the control of images that Viṭṭhalnāth had presented to his sons prior to his death. Both the third and sixth houses sought the right to worship a particular image of Kṛṣṇa that once belonged to Viṭṭhalnāth, but disputes within the two houses grew to a point where arbitration was necessary by other family members. Matters were settled until the members of the third house found themselves again at war with the sixth house towards the end of the seventeenth century. The *mahārāja* at the time, Brajbhūṣan, was still a

⁵² For details of the dispute see Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākṛtya ki Vārtā*, p. 35.

⁵³ See Śāstri, *Kāmkāroli kā Tīhās*, part 1, pp. 123-124.

minor and was in the care of his elder sister, Gaṅgā, who found her authority challenged by her uncle, Brajrāy, of the sixth house. The events that transpired were extraordinary. Both factions sued each other in Mughal court for control of the third house and all its wealth, but after Gaṅgā had won in court, Brajrāy hired a group of thieves to carry out what became a botched attempt to loot the riches of the third house.

Gaṅgā relocated the third house to Ahmedabad in Gujarat, where she found herself locked in a dispute with her uncle over control over a particular image in her possession. Gaṅgā and Brajrāy both enlisted Mughal help, but the Muslim governor of Gujarat, Maḥabat Khān, provided armed assistance to Brajrāy who then raided the third house's shrine in Ahmedabad, stealing the image in the middle of the temple's evening services. The image desired by the sixth house was recovered and now housed in the Gujarati port city of Surat, but at a severe cost to the internal unity of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Braj.⁵⁴ Two houses of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* had moved out of Braj, relations between the two were soured, and the sixth house was now viewed as the black sheep of the Vallabha dynastic family.

The presence of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Braj, however, would be shaken by larger circumstances beyond their control. When the Jāt rebellions began during the reign of Awrangzīb, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* found its stability in Braj to be threatened like the other religious communities of the area. Accordingly, the remaining *Puṣṭi Mārga* houses in Braj left the region and sought shelter in Rajasthan in the belief that they would be

⁵⁴ See Śāstrī, *Kāṃkārōṇi kā Itihās*, pp. 135-138, part 1, 143-145. Also see seventeenth century *Braj Bhāṣa* history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* written by Viṭṭhalnāth Bhaṭṭ, *Sampradāya Kalpadruma* (Bombay: Lakṣmivenkatesvara Chāpakhāna, 1893.), pp. 123-125. The description is found in Chapter 10, verses 72-75.

protected by Hindu kings willing to act as the protectors and patrons of Hindu *dharma*. Thus the period between 1670 and 1672 saw the establishment of various *Puṣṭi Mārga* shrines in different Hindu kingdoms in Rajasthan. Images associated with the second, fourth, and fifth houses were now housed in the Rajput kingdoms of Kota, Jaipur, and Bikaner while the third house and the first house, which possessed the community's principal image of Śrīnāthjī, moved to Mewar. The third house would eventually also move from Gujarat to Mewar during the reign of Awrangzīb while the sixth house remained in Gujarat. Thus the period in the community's history when all the houses would be united in one specific geographical location had now come to a permanent end. Internal family squabbles and the political uncertainties associated with the reign of Awrangzīb ensured that by the end of the seventeenth century, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would be dispersed throughout locations in Western India. With this dispersion of the seven houses, the Vallabha dynasty would enter a new phase in its history.

3.5 Evaluating the History of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* within the Context of the Religious History of Medieval North India

When placed within its proper social-historical context, the history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* can be interpreted as having its origins in the series of changes brought about in the religious landscape of North India that occurred as far back as the fifteenth century. The changes brought about by Muslim presence in North India gave rise within Hindu society to devotional communities that sought a solution to the political and social upheavals of their times filtered through the lenses of their unique religious worldviews.

One needs to stress, however, that these *bhakti* communities were not types of mass organized, unified political movements that advocated violent social or political action targeted specifically at Muslims. The *bhakti* communities that emerged out of Hindu society between the Sultanate and Mughal periods of North Indian history sought to readjust themselves to turbulent political times by articulating new religious visions that were distinct from both Islam and predominant forms of Hinduism. For communities like the *sants*, this meant articulating a new vision of religiosity that consciously sought to reject the caste system and the outward, ritualistic expressions of Hinduism and Islam for an interior spiritual quest for a formless spiritual Absolute. Others, however, like Tulsidās of Varanasi, stayed well within the boundaries of traditional Hindu values, but nonetheless articulated an accessible religious worldview that involved the repeated chanting of the name of Lord Rāma.

Within this larger framework, one can say that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* certainly developed along similar lines as its other *bhakti* counterparts in medieval North Indian society. If Vallabha's comments in *Śrī Kṛṣṇāśrāyaḥ* and his travels throughout North and Western India are indicative of his motivations for his preaching tours, then Vallabha himself was concerned with the effect that the political instability of the Delhi Sultanate was having on Hindu society. As a *brahmin* who was frustrated with the spread of Islam and what he believed was the breakdown of the caste system into a proliferation of heterodox religious communities, Vallabha did not advocate a solution to the ills of his time that would cause further social upheaval through direct political action against existing power structures or the outright rejection of Hinduism's caste system.

The *Puṣṭi Mārga*, instead, affirmed the basic structure and values of Hindu society, but stressed the importance of living a life of devotion to Kṛṣṇa that was grounded in a householder's life and based on the spiritual equality of social groups within Hindu society. For communities like artisinal, farming, and particularly mercantile groups whose livelihoods were very much dependant on the maintenance of a stable social order, it was not surprising that Vallabha's message would be so attractive. Vallabha's essentially life-affirming message was one that did not shake up a social order that had already experienced much turbulence. The *Puṣṭi Mārga* was socially conservative in nature yet nonetheless offered room for increased social mobility and prestige while still remaining well within the boundaries of Hindu society.

The growth of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in the aftermath of Vallabha's death most definitely benefited from the willingness of the community to integrate itself within the larger boundaries of the society in which it lived. The continued expansion of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* during and after the death of Viṭṭhalnāth came not through working outside mainstream Indian society, but instead by continuing to cultivate relationships with social groups for whom the maintenance of prestige and social order were of paramount importance. This referred not only to the mercantile and artisinal communities that formed the backbone of the membership of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, but also to the existing political structures within North Indian society. This meant approaching not only individuals like Rānī Durgāvātī or the Vaghelas who were associated with what was left of existing Hindu political structures in the aftermath of Muslim rule. It also involved approaching North India's Muslim rulers.

The patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by the Mughals was in itself not terribly surprising. The patronage of the community followed the overall patterns of religious patronage practiced by the Mughal authorities that granted land to religious communities in return for the promise that they pray for the overall welfare of the empire. Thus the patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* – like the patronage of the Gauḍiyas in Braj and other religious communities in North India – was linked to the larger concern of maintaining stability in the empire. Just as the temples owned by the Gauḍiyas in Braj area were reminders of the stabilizing presence of the Mughal state, the wealth and prosperity of the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* too was an outward sign that all was well and secure within the Mughal empire.

The prosperity that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* enjoyed due to the patronage of its imperial, mercantile, and artisinal patrons thus came to parallel the growth and prosperity of the Gauḍiya community in Braj. Vallabha and Caitanya both were travelling in Braj in the same time period preaching throughout the area and those who followed both religious teachers would carry out the process of consolidating the influence of their communities in the region. This seems to have started a form of competitive spirituality between the two communities that manifested itself in two very distinct networks of religious patronage. The Mughals had concentrated their patronage of the Braj area in the Gauḍiya dominated Vrindavana region where the Gauḍiya community used their close ties with the Amber family to carry out their temple construction efforts.

The *Puṣṭi Mārga*, after displacing the Gauḍīyas from Govardhan, carried out similar expansion efforts but by using their patronage network in Western and Central India to finance temple construction projects after securing proprietary rights over lands in the vicinity of Gokul and Govardhan. It appears, however, that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* bypassed the Hindu noblemen associated with the patronage network of the Gauḍīya community. The community, instead, seems to have dealt directly with imperial authorities and had even built direct ties with individuals within the Mughal court like Hamida Begum, Dāra Shikūh, or Alikhān Paṭhān who ensured that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would consolidate its control over Gokul and Govardhan.

The establishment of full control over the Śrīnāthjī temple and the creation of two centers of pilgrimage in Gokul and Govardhan allowed the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to then turn itself towards the task of community building. It would seem that there was an effort to fashion a cohesive, unified religious community of believers, who under the religious leadership of the *mahārājas* would have a distinct religious identity from the other religious communities around them. Thus an emphasis was placed in vernacular religious literature on the vision of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* community as a well-knit, self-sufficient community infused with the grace of Kṛṣṇa.

These efforts at maintaining the stability of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would, however, meet with difficulties. Disputes over wealth and leadership authority and the need to seek legal recourse or the aid of political officials would become a constant theme in the community's history onwards from the death of Vallabha until its exodus from Braj

towards the end of the seventeenth century. The history of the community – to be more specific, the fortunes of the first and the third houses in the kingdom of Mewar - in this post-Braj phase of its history is to be taken up in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 4

The Royal House of Mewar and the Politics of Rajasthan

The history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Rajasthan between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took place against the backdrop of sweeping political and social changes that would profoundly alter the face of the entire Indian subcontinent with the transition from the Mughal to the British empire. In this time period, the subcontinent experienced numerous rebellions, the proliferation of small independent kingdoms known as the Princely States, their gradual annexation by the British, and their ultimate acceptance of British paramountcy by the mid-eighteenth century. The acceptance of British suzerainty would deeply impact the political structures of the states especially in Rajasthan where the relationship between Rājput rulers and their nobility would be profoundly shaped by the colonial policy of indirect rule.

This would particularly apply to the state of Mewar, the oldest and most prestigious of the Rājput states, whose patronage of the first and third houses of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would make the kingdom the principal patron of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Rajasthan. The fortunes of the first and third houses were thus tied to the constantly fluctuating political fortunes of the Mewar royal house, hence making an understanding of the political changes in India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries extremely important in order to understand the rising influence of the community in Rajasthan, and how this influence would bring it into eventual conflict with the Mewar royal house. Consequently this chapter will be devoted solely to outlining these political changes in order to lay the

foundation for the next two chapters which will deal specifically with the settlement of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Mewar and its ultimate conflict with the state's royal house.

4.1 From The East India Company to The British Raj

Though the political dominance of the British empire would not manifest itself fully in the subcontinent until the mid-eighteenth century, the British had been well established in India as a major economic force since the beginning of the seventeenth century when Queen Elizabeth gave the East India Company a monopoly on all English trade with Asia. The Company thus slowly grew in size rivaled only by the Dutch East India Company, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century, India had become the major center of trade for Britain. Jahāngīr had given the company a grant in 1617 to open a trading post, Surat, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Company had transformed Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta into bustling commercial centers which were under British jurisdiction. It was in these areas that Indian artisans and merchants conducted business with the Company and other British residents who came to make their fortunes in the subcontinent.

The stability of the Mughal Empire allowed for the British to flourish in India, but the demise of Awrangzīb's empire in 1707 signaled an important turning point in the history of the British presence in India. The Sikhs also joined the Jāts and the Marāṭhās in opposing the Mughal through armed force and out of the ensuing chaos emerged a number of regional kingdoms, which would eventually amount to 500 princes and rulers

by the end of the nineteenth century, spread out all over India reaching as far south as Mysore, Cochin, and Travancore. Many of these kingdoms were known to the British as the Princely States and were established well before the presence of the British in areas such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bengal, and Assam. Others located mostly in the Saurashtra and Kathiawad regions of Gujarat were prominent local landlords (*zamīndārs*), whose large landholdings made them royalty in the eyes of their tenants.

It was in the midst of this messy realignment of the Indian political scene that the Company used military intervention in the internal affairs of kingdoms in order to further its own business interests. After winning a prolonged four year battle with their trading rival, France, over control of the regional kingdoms in South India, the British continued determinedly to increase their profits through military force and sowing internal dissension among kingdoms by pitting one ruler against the other. The results would prove to be enormously successful. Between 1757 and 1856 the British had consolidated their power throughout North, Central, Western, Eastern, and Southern India by annexing the kingdoms.¹ This was accomplished with the help of an army of Indian soldiers known as *sepoys* who were recruited by the British from the upper castes of Hindu society in the eastern sections of the Gangetic Plain between Awadh and Bihar.

The annexation of Awadh in 1856 and the growing indifference of the British to the cultural sensitivities of their Muslim and Hindu soldiers sparked a year long revolt in 1857-1858 that was concentrated in Central and Northern India, but spread into Rajasthan

¹ For primary sources dealing with the British annexation of the subcontinent see, Michael Fisher, ed., *The Politics of the British Annexation of India, 1757-1857* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

and Maharashtra. The revolt itself had no focussed plan to oust the British. Numerous leaders, from the politically impotent Mughal emperor Bahādur Shah Zafar to the Queen Regent of the recently annexed kingdom of Awadh, all claimed to be leading the uprising, but the fall of Delhi, Kanpur, and Lucknow to the rebels and stiff opposition of rebels in Central India by the likes of regional leaders such as the Queen of Jhānsī, Nānā Sahib, and Tātyā Tope shook the Company and the British Empire to their very foundations. The rebellion was put down, but it was evident that the Company, with its reputation for rapaciousness and corruption, was now clearly a mere shadow of its former self. The Company, which was once subject to twenty-year charter reviews of its administration by the British Parliament, now relinquished its jurisdiction of India directly to the British Crown in 1858. In London, a cabinet member known as the Secretary of State for India was given authority to govern India taking advice for his decisions by a body known as the Council of India. In India, supreme authority was vested in the Viceroy, who administered the affairs of the subcontinent from Calcutta with the help of an executive council. The functions of the Viceroy and his council were paralleled on a regional level by the governors and executive councils that looked after the affairs in the three core administrative centers of the Empire: the Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras Presidencies.

4.1.1 British Paramountcy and the Theory of Indirect Rule

The firm establishment of British colonialism in India during the nineteenth century was due in large part to what was known as the subsidiary alliance system which the

Company established in the late part of the eighteenth century.² The Company had neither the military or the financial abilities to conquer and rule over India and instead decided to exert direct political authority over key economic and political areas while forming political alliances with the Princely States as a means to control other areas of the subcontinent indirectly. Thus it was inevitable that indirect rule was established primarily with states whose geographical locations were either too remote for direct control or were close enough to make them the easy targets of British rule. States such as Hyderabad, Awadh, Patiala, and certain Maṛaṭhā states, for example, were surrounded by British controlled territory and were isolated by their location near the sea making them incapable of challenging British power effectively. In the case of areas like Rajasthan with its vast expanse of deserts or the jungle areas of Kathiawad, the geographic remoteness made them more amenable to the indirect rule of the British.³

Many of the Princely States were drawn into the realm of British control with the promise of political stability. The subsidiary alliance system came into existence between the 1780s and 1810 at a time when North India was racked by the instability that came with the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. States were formed through the dominance of one local elite over the other or on a larger scale by one kingdom over the other. Thus one witnessed warring between the Maṛaṭhās and the state of Hyderabad while in Rajasthan, the entire region was racked by civil war which was then exploited by the

² For details of the system of indirect rule see Michael H. Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System, 1764-1858* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Barbara Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire: Dissolution of a Patron-Client System 1914-1939* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), pp. 4-28.

Maṛaṭhās, who began to invade the region in the late eighteenth century. The subsidiary alliance system put an end to shifting political boundaries by well demarcating the boundaries of kingdoms and ensuring that succession to the throne was accomplished by the rule of primogeniture. Most importantly, however, the British promised those rulers who would enter into the subsidiary alliance system that they and their descendants would be guaranteed military protection from internal or external threats.⁴

In return, the rulers of the princely states would acknowledge British suzerainty and provide military support to the British in the form of troops or annual monetary tributes to their British overlords. Thus it was not surprising that many of the Princely States remained staunch supporters of the colonial government during the time of the Mutiny and would continue to provide military support to colonial authorities right up until India achieved independence from the British in 1947. The British, however, tightly controlled the military movements of the Princely States. Fearful that the rulers could form political alliances with powers hostile to British interests, the British did not allow rulers to have any Europeans or North Americans in their employ, and all Princely States had to agree that they could not engage in foreign relations with any power within or outside the Indian state unless it was mediated by colonial authorities. Internally, however, the affairs of the Princely States were to be run without interference from the paramount power. The formulation of laws, the administration of justice, revenue collection, maintenance of

³ Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire*, pp. 9-10

⁴ Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire*, pp. 14-17.

estates, and exerting control over nobles were all concentrated firmly in the hands of the rulers who governed more by decree rather than by the rules of participatory democracy.⁵

The mediating force between colonial authorities and the princes were civil servants who were members of the Foreign Department of the Government of India. In some states, these individuals were known as Political Officers who answered to the provincial governor, but in Rajasthan and Central India, where there was a large proliferation of small kingdoms, these states were under the supervision of Agents to the Governor-General of India (AGGs), who employed Political Residents who themselves were permitted to have direct contact with the Political Secretary for the Indian government as well as with the rulers of the Princely States. Thus the lines of political communication between colonial authorities and the princely states followed a general pattern. The concerns of rulers were communicated to the local agent or resident, who then passed on these concerns to the political secretary and either the AGG or provincial governor. It was only then that matters of concern to the ruler could be passed on directly to the viceroy in Calcutta. The role of the local agent or officer was, therefore, crucial when it came to maintaining relations with the princely states. It was his job to maintain friendly relationships with the royal court (*darbār*), legitimate successions to the throne, handle all communications between British authorities and the princes, and to monitor the internal affairs of the state with a stance of non-interference.⁶

⁵ Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire*, p 10.

⁶ Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire*, pp. 18-19.

The degree to which British authorities actually adopted a stance of neutrality in the affairs of the Princely States was rather debatable. The Company had annexed their lands in spite of the treaties that were signed, and colonial authorities regularly took over the administration of a state when they saw it necessary. They were highly involved in succession disputes and frequently chose the ruler themselves. They intervened when a minor succeeded to the throne or if a prince was deemed to be delinquent in properly governing his state. Claims to further the economic development of the state were another means by which British authorities could interfere in the affairs of a state. Rulers were so bound to age-old customs that they were rarely interested in the modernization of their state's economic infrastructure even if the costs for its development and maintenance would be shared jointly with colonial authorities.

Claiming that modernization was imperative to the overall defense of the subcontinent, colonial authorities asserted the right to intervene in the internal affairs of states to construct railway lines, telegraph systems, or proper roads. Rulers were perfectly aware that the motives of colonial authorities were less than noble, as the construction of an effective communication network across the continent served to consolidate colonial control over the subcontinent. Rulers thus found themselves faced with a difficult decision. Those who insisted on maintaining authority over their states, constantly thwarting colonial efforts to take control of their state's economic development, left their states in a state of economic backwardness. Those who, on the other hand, agreed to

British intervention had to give up possession and sovereignty over lands upon which development was taking place.⁷

All this seemed in direct contradiction to colonial policy on India as enunciated by none other than Queen Victoria herself. On the day in 1858 that India was transferred to the British Crown, Queen Victoria issued a proclamation to heads of the Princely States that the Company's practice of deposing princes and annexing their lands would now cease under the new Government of India. The Crown instead would commit itself to the social advancement of the subcontinent through peace and good government by acknowledging the dignity and the honor of the 'native' princes whose age-old customs and practices would always remain untouched by the Government of India. This change in colonial policy was then expressed ritually in the series of *darbārs* or royal courts that were organized in 1859 by Lord Canning, the new viceroy of India.

The *darbārs* were meant to honor the rulers of different princely states by bestowing titles and honors upon them within an atmosphere that simulated the grandeur of the Mughal courts. The *darbārs* were thus presented as being grand ceremonial expressions of the central role that the Princely States were supposed to play in the new colonial order.⁸ In reality, however, these *darbārs* amounted to nothing more than a carefully staged form of political theatre that perpetuated the illusion that the age-long traditions of Indian kingship in all its glory still shaped the future of the subcontinent when in fact the

⁷ Ramusack, *The Princes of India in the Twilight of Empire*, p. 19-22.

⁸ Barbara D. and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 103-104.

British were manipulating the states to further their own political ends. In other words, the encompassment of the Princely States within the larger framework of colonial policy and its ritual expression in the form of the 1859 *darbārs* represented how the British had used the subsidiary alliance system and the theory of indirect rule to finally consolidate their authority over the subcontinent.

4.1.2 The Politics of Power in Rajasthan

One of the areas of the subcontinent in which the British found themselves deeply embedded was the large geographical area known to the British as Rājputana, otherwise known as Rajasthan. The area was ruled by Hindu chieftains known as Rājput̥s who belonged to the warrior caste of Hindu society whose clans claimed that their lineage was of divine origin having been founded by Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, or the fire god, Agni. All lineages prided themselves on their divine pedigrees, their high commitment to chivalry and valor, and their cultivation of large estates as a means of reflecting their social and economic standing in larger Rājput̥ society. Thus land, caste, and lineage were the three elements that were crucial to Rājput̥ self-identity and would be the elements from which the legitimacy of Rājput̥ political leadership was derived. The political leadership of a particular Rājput̥ kingdom was generally dominated by one particular clan. The Kacchvāhaṣ, for example, ruled over Jaipur, the Rathors clan ruled over Jodhpur, the Cauhāns over Śekhāvāṭī, and the Śiṣoḍias over the state of Mewar. The head of the clan

ruled over the state as the *mahārāṇa* while his clan brethren made up the nobility of the state and ruled from their own private estates (*jāgīrs*) as estate chiefs (*jāgīrdārs*).

Jāgīrdārs, in return for the royal confirmation of their estates, were all required to pledge their allegiance to the *mahārāṇa* of their state, provide him with military support, and attend upon him at court and carry out any services the *mahārāṇa* might require of them.⁹

Mahārāṇas were extremely protective of the authority over their lands.

Bureaucratic structures that delegated power to various department officials were not highly evolved in Rājput states for *mahārāṇas* were determined to personally make all political decisions and were unwilling to allow for anything to interfere with their personal rule. The overall efficiency with which a state administered widely was dependant on the ruling capabilities of a given ruler and the degree to which he truly believed his throne (*gaddī*) was to be used for his personal enjoyment or for the benefit of his subjects. For the most part, however, the political aspirations of the vast majority of Rajasthani subjects were largely irrelevant in shaping the future of a Rājput state, limiting the political influence that could be exerted primarily to the first three castes of Hindu society. The members of the business (*vaishya*) communities acted as the chief sources of capital for the Rājput regimes and financed *mahārāṇas* from their banking firms scattered across the Bombay Presidency.¹⁰ Members of the brahminical community also were of

⁹ Suzanne Hoeber Rudolph, "The Princely States of Rajputana: Ethic, Authority, and Structure," in *Political System in India*, ed. Verinder Grover (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1989), pp. 105-107.

¹⁰ Rudolph, "The Princely States of Rājputana," pp. 115-116.

some influence in Rājput kingdoms acting as the guardians of the spiritual and moral welfare for a kingdom. Close alliances with brahminical communities, of course, lent tremendous legitimacy to a *mahārāṇa*'s regime and communities were rewarded generously by the state. *Mahārāṇas*, in keeping with their warrior duty (*dharma*) to protect brahmins, gave nearly one-fifth of state land to brahmins, bards, and genealogists who were promised to be exempt from taxation by the state.¹¹

The members of the nobility, of course, had the greatest potential to influence state decisions, but the regular conflict over political authority made it a certitude that the *jāgīrdārī-mahārāṇa* relationship would always be in a constant state of flux. *Jāgīrs* themselves were like miniature kingdoms with the *jāgīrdārs* having the ability to collect revenues from their tenants, administer justice over their lands, and even maintain small military retainers which were to be used to defend their estates and the royal court to which they were attached. *Jāgīrdārs* were very wary of any attempts by the *mahārāṇa* to encroach on their powers, thus limiting to a large extent just how much control a *mahārāṇa* could have over his people. The *mahārāṇa*'s principal source of income was derived from crown lands (*khalsa*) over which he had direct control and consequently, he could easily collect revenue from those subjects living in crown lands. Efforts to extend taxation rights into *jāgīrs* were constantly thwarted by nobles who were only willing to pay their regular tribute (*nazarānā*) to the court for the royal recognition of their estates. In a similar vein, *jāgīrdārs* construed state intervention in their judicial and revenue

¹¹ Rudolph, "The Princely States of Rājputana," pp. 113-114.

affairs as a form of state interference rendering the royal court unable to establish direct relations with the vast majority of its subjects.

Thus the notion that power was centralized in the hands of the *mahārāṇa* was something of an illusion. *Jāgīrdārs* may have recognized the *mahārāṇa* as the first among equals within their clan, but the *mahārāṇa* had no real direct ties with the vast majority of his subjects. They lay beyond his reach in the realm of the *jāgīrs* whose chiefs had such wide administrative powers that they could effectively challenge the authority of a *mahārāṇa* if they so desired.¹² Thus the checks the Mughals placed upon the power of the nobility and local landowners in order to maintain the emperor's fiscal, judicial, and political control over his lands were lacking in the Rājput state giving the state's *jāgīrdārs* an inordinate amount of political power. The result was an imbalance of power in the Rājput State that would find the *mahārāṇa* frequently being pitted against the members of his nobility.

4.1.3 Rajasthan Under Indirect Rule

The political in-fighting within Rājput states would be the main reason for the political chaos that ensued in Rajasthan after the collapse of the Mughal Empire under Awrangzīb. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Marāṭhās took advantage of the political squabbling within Rājput states to pit kingdoms against each other in order to usurp political power and to plunder the region of all its wealth and resources. Thus

British paramountcy looked most attractive to Rājput rulers and by 1818, all Rājput kingdoms had agreed to enter into the subsidiary alliance system subject to the same treaty terms as all other Princely States. The alliances were the best way, Rājput rulers believed, to end decades of civil war. For the British, the alliance with Rājput states was a perfect way to turn the unruly kingdoms into efficient, bureaucratized political entities that would aid colonial authorities in the orderly administration of the subcontinent.

The British were very cognizant of the constant disputes between nobles and *mahārāṇas* in Rājput kingdoms and consequently decided it would be more prudent to rule Rajasthan from within the region rather than from Calcutta. Thus the AGGs for the region came to reside in Ajmer with the purpose of monitoring affairs within the Rājput state, trying to meet their larger political goals without giving up the stance of neutrality to which they had agreed in their alliances with the Princely States. Colonial authorities were able to accomplish this most successfully during periods of minority regency. Regency councils consisting of nobles chaired by the Political Resident would manage the affairs of the regime till the prince came of age. In the meantime, the British would appoint tutors to the prince while the Political Resident would advise the Council on administrative matters after which point the Council would issue its formal decision.

Minority periods were thus perfect periods during which the British could lay down the foundation for colonial interests in a given state and then ensure that those interests would be fulfilled once the prince had reached the age of majority. If colonial authorities

¹² Rudolph, "The Princely States of Rājputana: Ethic, Authority, Structure," pp. 107-110

found it necessary, however, they would actually take over the running of state if a minority reign might cause political instability. It was under this justification of maintaining peace and order that at times colonial authorities would claim the necessity of violating treaty rules.¹³ Thus, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the British saw fit to financially and militarily punish the state of Jaipur for what they believed were fiscal irregularities arising within the state due to the increased patronage of the ascetic Nāth community. In some instances, however, colonial authorities would go one step further and use military force during succession disputes to depose a ruler for a rival claimant backed by colonial authorities in Ajmer. Thus, one finds that during the nineteenth century, the British actually had militarily punished the states of Bharatpur, Kishangarh, and Dungarpur for not supporting claimants recognized by colonial authorities.

After the 1857 rebellion, however, colonial officials would become wary of wanting to use military force on any states in the region. The rebellion itself was caused in part by the annexation policies of the East India Company, and after 1857 parliamentary approval from London would be necessary before colonial authorities in India could depose a leader who was not in a territory directly under crown supervision. Colonial authorities instead took to gently instructing rulers that they were to pursue the stern task of governance instead of pursuing extravagant pleasures. Leaders were taught the importance of 'proper' administrative skills by British authorities and rulers eager to keep themselves in the good graces of the paramount power did take greater steps to create a

¹³ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Suzanne Hoeber Rudolph, "Rajputana under British Paramountcy: The Failure of

more clearly defined bureaucratic structure with clearly defined government departments and a modernized economic infrastructure.¹⁴

Such measures, however, were done under rather restricted circumstances. Members of the nobility were not willing to give up their jurisdictional powers to the *mahārāṇas* nor were the *mahārāṇas* willing to allow for any sort of governmental structure that would interfere with their personal rule. Rājput *mahārāṇas* for centuries had ruled on the basis that they were continuing age-old traditions associated with lineages of divine origins, and consequently resisted British pressures for the creation of an open, competitive civil service or any sort of political system that approximated a representative democracy. They were afraid that it would undermine the centuries old right of the royal house to rule over its subjects. Thus, regardless of British pressures to centralize authority and regularize administration in Rājput kingdoms, *mahārāṇas* and *jāgīrdārs* alike were not willing to make substantial changes in the administrative structures of their states or to allow for the creation of institutional restraints on the powers of the *mahārāṇa* or the nobility. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was clear that the aims behind British paramountcy in Rajputana had ultimately failed.¹⁵

Indirect Rule," *Journal of Modern History* 38 (1966), pp. 140-141.

¹⁴ Rudolph and Rudolph, "Rājputana Under British Paramountcy," pp. 142-147.

4.2 The History of Mewar: From the Origins to the Fall of the Mughals

The Rājput kingdom of Mewar perfectly illustrates the larger trends in the Rajasthani politics during both the Mughal and colonial periods of Rajasthani history.¹⁶ Of the Rājput kingdoms in Rajasthan, the Sisodia *mahārāṇas* of Udaipur were universally recognized as holding the highest rank and dignity among the Rājput princes of India. The Mewar *mahārāṇas* traced their origins to the Sun god, Sūrya, and attributed the foundation of their state to the legendary hero, Bappa Rāval, who was said to have established the capital of Mewar at the hill fortress of Chittor in 734 C.E. The rulers who followed Bappa between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries gradually transformed Mewar's agrarian economy into an urban economy by taking advantage of Chittor's position as the center that linked Western India to trade routes in Central and Northern India.

The geographically strategic position of Mewar may help to explain why it was the target of Sultan Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī. Passing through Mewar on his way to conquer neighboring Gujarat, Alā' al-Dīn launched a full-scale invasion of Mewar in 1303 and sacked Chittor. This would mark the beginning of Sultanate control over Mewar under both the Khaljīs and Tughluq dynasties. The reign of *Mahārāṇa* Hamīr Singh (r. 1326-1364) marked an important turning point in the early history of Mewar. Hamīr successfully regained control of Chittor and thus ushered in a long period of prosperity

¹⁵ Rudolph and Rudolph, "Rājputana Under British Paramountcy," pp. 159-160.

for himself and his successors. Invasions by outside forces, however, remained a problem for Mewar and its *mahārāṇas*. The *mahārāṇas* who followed Hamīr had to stave off attacks from the regional sultanates established in Malwa and Gujarat, but Chittor was again sacked in 1535. Thirty-two years later, a defiant Mewar refused to bow down to Mughal suzerainty and a furious Akbar, in 1567, sacked Chittor for the third time in the kingdom's history. Mewar now needed a new center of power and a year later in 1568, *Mahārāṇa* Uday Singh (r.1537-1572) founded Udaipur, which would become the permanent seat of power for the Mewar Rājputs.

The battering that Mewar took at the hands of Akbar did very little to diminish Mewar's opposition to the Mughals. The Mewar *mahārāṇas* were unwilling to taint their royal blood and stain their honor by following the example of other Rājput kingdoms and enter into the Mughal nobility through marriage alliances with the ruling emperor. This resistance towards Mughal suzerainty invited two more attacks upon the kingdom by Akbar in 1576 and 1578, and those were followed by yet another attack on Mewar in 1613 by Jahāngīr. Jahāngīr's invasion of Mewar proved to be too much to bear for a kingdom that was still reeling from the effects of Akbar's invasions. *Mahārāṇa* Amar Singh I (r.1597-1620) capitulated and accepted Mughal suzerainty, albeit on terms that were very different from what the Mughals negotiated with other Rājput kingdoms: there would be no marriage alliances between the two parties and the crown prince of Mewar would attend the Mughal court instead of the *mahārāṇa* himself. Mewar's recognition of

¹⁶ This historical summary is based on Rajat Ray, "Mewar: The Breakdown of a Public Order," in *People, Princes, and Paramount Power*, ed. Robin Jeffrey (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 205-206.

Mughal suzerainty was thus nominal. There were no marriage alliances to concretize the relationship between Mewar and Delhi, and the *mahārāṇa* would never have to submit to the humiliation of waiting on the emperor. Mewar's honor remained intact and, more importantly, so did its political independence. The *mahārāṇas* paid token acceptance to Mughal authority and at the same time maintained their independence in ruling over the internal affairs of their kingdom.

This independence that Mewar enjoyed in its internal affairs allowed the kingdom the opportunity to turn inwards. The task of reconstructing a society ravaged by warfare and famine was now undertaken by *mahārāṇa* Rāj Singh (r.1652-1680). Under his reign, major public works projects were instituted in Mewar in order to create employment for his poverty-stricken subjects. Consequently, Mewar witnessed a type of economic and cultural renaissance under Rāj Singh's reign. Tracts of land were carefully apportioned out to his subjects, villages began to be rebuilt, while temples and palaces were constructed and reconstructed. Thus Rāj Singh had a number of small temples dedicated to various Hindu deities within the premises of the Jagadīs temple in Udaipur, and followed his temple renovation projects with the construction of artificial lakes of which the most important was Rajsamand Lake.

The lake, built in 1676, was meant to be a resort and attracted at its opening a large number of the Rājput nobility and an equally large number of brahmins who flocked there to receive alms and gifts from their royal patron. Rāj Singh was thus well respected

by his subjects, but could hardly be called the darling of Awrangzīb. He managed to maintain peace with Awrangzīb, but matters changed when he abducted and married a Rājput princess named Cārumatī who was engaged to the emperor. Rāj Singh then later harbored a political fugitive wanted by the Mughals. Awrangzīb was not pleased and sent a military expedition against Mewar in 1679. Mewar's political system was severely bruised and battered, but nonetheless managed to survive yet another attack in its long history.¹⁷

4.2.1 The Breakdown of the Mewar Political System and the Ascendancy of the British

The political structure system that held Mewar together for so many centuries even in the midst of repeated attacks by the Mughals was typical of all Rājput states.¹⁸ Lands near Udaipur were considered to be crown (*khalsa*) lands under the direct control of the royal court (*darbār*) while the outlying areas of the state and, consequently, the most vulnerable to outside attack were assigned as *jāgīrs* to the heads of the various Sisoḍia lineages, who were divided into four ranks. Chiefs of the first rank appeared in the court of the *mahārāṇa* only by special invitation for festivals and solemn ceremonies and also held the position of hereditary councilors, whose rank was higher than that of the crown

¹⁷ A useful summary of Rāj Singh's reign can be found in Sri Ram Sharma, *Maharana Raj Singh and His Times* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971). For a contemporary account of Raj Singh's reign, see the Sanskrit work of the Mewar bard, Rāṇachhoḍ, *Rājprasastiḥ Mahākāvyaṃ* (Udaypur: Sāhitya Samsthān, 1973).

¹⁸ This discussion is again based on Ray's "Mewar," pp. 209-211.

prince. The second class chiefs, who were required to attend the Mewar court regularly, served the Udaipur *darbār* as military officers and commanders who protected the Mewar countryside. The nobles of the third rank constituted the standing force of the *mahārāṇa*, and were expected to protect the *mahārāṇa* from the possible military opposition of the higher ranking members of the Mewari nobility.

Jāgīrdārs collected land revenues from their peasants and paid a small, fixed tribute to the *mahārāṇa* himself, but otherwise, were given full freedom to exercise their own powers over the matters and decisions concerning the internal economy of the *jāgīr* without any interference from the *mahārāṇa* and his officials. In the case of the nobles of the first rank, their *jāgīrs* were exact replicas of the *mahārāṇa*'s government except on a smaller scale. The first rank nobles ruled over their own sub-vassals, who were assigned tracts of land and were expected to attend upon individual *jāgīrdārs*, as well as protect them and advise them in times of war and peace.

The overall structure of Mewar society, however, collapsed with the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. Two leading Sisoḍiā clans, named the Śaktāvāts and Cundāvāts, began to feud militarily, nobles increasingly refused to provide military forces and would repeatedly encroach on *khalsa* lands and incorporate them into their own *jāgīrs*. Thus the *mahārāṇa* had no option but to seek recourse from outside forces. Mercenaries were recruited to defend the *mahārāṇa*, and then the Marāṭhās appeared in Mewar taking full advantage of the chaos associated with the civil war. The Marāṭhās increasingly embedded themselves in the politics of Mewar and soon began to plunder the land and

exact exorbitant tributes from the Rājput̥s for the assistance they had provided in arbitrating the numerous squabbles between feuding clans. As the authority of the *mahārāṇa* declined, havoc ensued in Mewar's countryside as villagers began to be blackmailed by individual warriors in return for military protection. Urban and rural areas gradually began to depopulate and the economy of the state subsequently collapsed.

It was against this backdrop that the Udaipur *darbār* under the reign of *mahārāṇa* Bhīm Singh accepted British paramountcy in January of 1818. The treaty stipulations to which other Rājput̥ states agreed applied to Mewar, but with the added condition that the *mahārāṇa* was supposed to pay a fixed tribute to the British, and ultimately submit to their arbitration should differences arise between the *mahārāṇa* and other Rājput̥s. Once the agreement was signed, the reconstruction of Mewar was then gladly given by the *darbār* to the British political agent, James Tod. Tod viewed Mewar's past in an extremely romanticized light, seeing Mewar's conflicts with the Mughals as the expression of a noble clan willing to defend its land and faith at all costs even if it included death.¹⁹

Tod was thus determined to restore Mewar to its former glory by reconstructing Mewar's political system as it had existed before the kingdom's civil war and the ensuing Marāṭhā invasions. This was easier said than done. Encouraging the population to return

¹⁹ Tod's idealization of Mewar's past is found in his account of Mewar's history, in his *Annals and Antiquities*, part 1, pp. 173-390. There are, however, two more very important works on Mewar of which one is Śyāmaladas' *Vir Vinod* : 2 vols in 4 parts (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Kapoor, 1986) published in the late nineteenth century. This work has served as the basis for subsequent histories of Mewar including the equally important work of G.H. Ojha, *Udaipur Rājya kā Itihās*, 2 vols. (Jodhpur: Rājasthānī Granthāgār, 1996-7).

to a desolate kingdom was in itself difficult, as was encouraging economic growth again in the kingdom. It was even more difficult to restore ties between the *mahārāṇa* and the Mewar nobility. Negotiations were fraught with tensions as Tod sought to assuage bruised egos and prevent the rekindling of ancient feuds, but in May of 1818, an agreement was concluded between the nobility and the *mahārāṇa*. Usurped land was to be returned to the rightful owners, the authority of the *mahārāṇa* was to be obeyed, nobles were to be given their due recognition, peasants in the *jāgīrs* were not to be oppressed, and criminal elements were not to be harbored within estates.²⁰

The 1818 agreement, however, did very little to change the relationship between the *mahārāṇas* and the nobles. The traditional authority of the *mahārāṇa* seemed to be restored, as were the rights and privileges of the nobility, but disputes over the borders that divided *khalsa* land and *jāgīrs* were still common, as were issues over the recognition of the *mahārāṇa*'s sovereignty. The head of the Cundāvat lineage repeatedly attempted to undermine the authority of the *darbār* throughout the second half the nineteenth century by driving *darbār* troops out of its estates in 1855, harboring rebels during the 1857 mutiny, and even attempting to stall coronation ceremonies in the *darbār* in 1861.

In a similar vein, the Salumbra clan as well as peasant tribes took advantage of the weakened state of affairs in the state in order to challenge the authority of Svarūp Singh

²⁰ See Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, part 1, pp. 170-171.

who was preoccupied with maintaining his commitment to the British to track down rebels associated with the 1857 mutiny. Disputes between the *darbār* and the segment of the nobility would continue to manifest themselves during the reign of Sajjan Singh (r.1874-1884). Sajjan Singh was a minor when he ascended to the throne of Mewar, and found himself challenged by his uncle Sohan Singh who was contemplating using armed force against his nephew.

Darbār-jāgīrdari relations would be further compounded over the issue of monetary tributes to be paid to the *darbār* by the members of the nobility. This resulted in a number of agreements (*qaulnāmas*) in 1827, 1837, 1839, and 1854 that attempted to stabilize the fiscal relations between the nobility and the *darbār*. The extent of authority that the *mahārāṇas* and *jāgīrdārs* had over criminal and administrative areas would also remain points of contention until 1878. The two sides then agreed that the *mahārāṇa* should not interfere with the civil and criminal cases, which were presided over by the first fourteen nobles of the Mewar nobility. The Udaipur court, however, would listen to all appeals and cases of murder, child slavery, dacoity, robbery, widow burning, and the counterfeiting of money would have to be reported to the *darbār* for the examination of the *mahārāṇa*. With the 1878 agreement, the relations between the *mahārāṇas* and the *jāgīrdārs* thus seemed to be stabilized.²¹

Such agreements were inevitably brokered by the British who, despite their professed stance of neutrality, were always involved in the affairs of the state.²² The British placed

²¹ Ray, "Mewar", pp. 214-215

troops on Mewar soil in order to aid the *darbār* to quell peasant uprisings in 1826 and 1840, and they were behind the military force that eventually crushed the 1875 rebellion of Sohan Singh against his young nephew. Colonial authorities were also intimately involved in the squabbles between the *mahārāṇas* and their nobility, and they were given to frequently controlling the state's budgets in order to extract the *darbār*'s annual tribute to the crown. Thus one finds numerous examples of colonial authorities penalizing the *darbār* for being in arrears and prodding the *mahārāṇas* to pay off their debts.

The British, of course, were equally involved in matters of succession surrounding the three consecutive reigns of Śambhu Singh (r. 1861-1874), Sajjan Singh, and Fateh Singh (r. 1884-1930). Political Agents organized, chaired, and advised the Regency Councils of Mewari nobles who were to aid Śambhu Singh and Sajjan Singh in running the state until they had come of age. In the case of Fateh Singh, the British decided that though Fateh Singh was thirty-four years old, he was so inexperienced in matters of statecraft, that any decisions he took could only be done with the consent of colonial authorities until he had learned the proper art of statecraft.

When the British, however, relinquished control of Mewar to Fateh Singh it became increasingly difficult to control the *mahārāṇa*. Fateh Singh was determined to restore Mewar to its ancient glory by freeing the state from its subservience to the British. His first step was to discontinue the governmental reforms carried out by the *mahārāṇas* prior

²² For the account that follows of the reigns of Śambhu Singh to Fateh Singh, see Rama Vallabh Somani, *Later Mewar* (Jaipur: Shantidevi Somani, 1985), pp. 244-294.

to him. The introduction of English-medium schools between 1865 and 1870, the creation of a Public Works department, and the formation of independent Courts of Appeal were all construed by Fateh Singh as continuing interference from the British. Thus Fateh Singh repeatedly tried to unsuccessfully thwart British attempts at economically developing Mewar through railway, irrigation, and mining projects, for he believed their activities constituted a breach of the 1818 treaty that guaranteed his independence to rule over his state. This resistance to the reforms of the British, however, came at a price. When Mewar entered into the twentieth century, it remained something of an historical anachronism. The political and economic structure of pre-Māṛathā Mewar remained virtually intact until India's independence in 1947.²³

4.2.2 Conclusion

The state of Mewar thus had a long and complicated history that was always deeply impacted by the imperial politics of the Mughal and British regimes. Mewar barely survived numerous attacks from the Sultanate and Mughal regimes for its insistence on protecting the purity of its ancient sanctity, but the state would crack due to the stresses that came with the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. The acceptance of British paramountcy did bring stability to the state, but it was unable to solve the perennial difficulties characteristic of so many Rājput states: the imbalance of power between the *mahārāṇa* and his nobles. The 1818 agreement between the *darbār* and the Mewari nobility sought to define the relationship between the two parties, but their relationship

²³ Ray, "Mewar," pp. 223-225.

would be constantly fraught with tensions as both sides continued throughout the nineteenth century to disagree over matters of administrative, judicial, and fiscal authority.

These tensions consequently put much strain on the political system of Mewar and was compounded by the conservatism of the Mewar *darbār* which resisted any outside attempts to reform its economic and political system. The British, meanwhile, loomed in the background carefully watching the affairs of the state, using their position as the paramount power in Mewar to ensure that its interests were protected. Thus Mewar's history both before and during the reign of the British was structured by a very complicated web of conflicting political relationships which would repeatedly leave Mewar in a state of shambles. When the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would enter into Mewar at the end of the seventeenth century, it would have to adjust itself to a set of social and political circumstances that were vastly different from what they had experienced in Braj. How the first and third houses of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would adjust to their new environment is to be taken up in the next two chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 5

Being Gurus and Jāgīrdārs: The Growth of the Puṣṭi Mārga in Rajasthan (1671-1880)

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* had become an extraordinarily prosperous community. Vallabha had created the basic patronage network for his community which his successors then expanded in order to enjoy state protection from the Mughals and a steady flow of financial support from devotees who came primarily from the affluent mercantile community of Gujarat. The result was the very visible presence of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Braj. The community's central site of pilgrimage was at Govardhan where the *seva* to Śrīnāthjī was maintained by the income that the community accrued from its numerous land holdings in the vicinity of Govardhan and Gokul.

Gokul became the center of spiritual authority for the community whose seven *mahārājas* enjoyed a dual position as spiritual leaders and wealthy landowners who used the income from their lands to support their extended families and the temples in which they lived. In the late seventeenth century, however, that prosperity was shaken with the dispersal of the seven houses from Braj. The fighting between the third and sixth houses of the community resulted in the eventual settlement of both houses in Surat where the third house continued to be troubled by its brethren in the sixth house until it – like the remaining houses in Braj – left for Rajasthan in order to escape the unsettled social conditions associated with the unrest in the empire. The first and third houses would find refuge in Mewar where they, in the midst of very different political circumstances, would come to duplicate the material success they had enjoyed under the Mughals. The manner

in which this was accomplished and how it led to the rising influence of the community in Rajasthan is to be taken up in this chapter.

5.1 The Entry of the Third House into Mewar

The relationship between the members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the Rajput nobility had a history that predated the exodus of the community from Braj to Rajasthan. Mahārāṇa Jagat Singh I (r. 1628-1652) of Mewar had accompanied his mother on a pilgrimage through Western and Northern India and had stopped at Gokul, which was his last stop on tour of Braj.¹ *Puṣṭi Mārga* tradition recounts that during the heat of the summertime, Jagat Singh had visited the temple belonging to the third house of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* which housed the image of Dvārkaḍhīś where he was most captivated by the care given to ensure the image was dressed appropriately for the season. The image was dressed in light cotton clothing and was adorned with pearls; it was protected from the heat through the application of sandalwood and the sprinkling of rosewater and it was serenaded with devotional hymns appropriate for the time of day. The sight, tradition states, piqued Jagat Singh's interest in the *seva* of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and prompted the ruler to engage in philosophical conversations with the then head of the third house, Giridhar.

¹ According to Raṇchoḍ, Jagat Singh had left on a pilgrimage tour with his mother in 1647, which included Ayodhya, Varanasi, Prayag, and Braj. It was during this time period that Jagat Singh visited Gokul and also went to the Śrināthjī temple on Govardhan. Jagat Singh seemed to have made annual pilgrimages of this nature and, according to Raṇchoḍ, had gone six years earlier to Dvarka in 1641 where he had made a donation of land to a woman who seems to have been a grand-daughter of Viṭṭhalnāth. See Raṇchoḍ, *Rājāprasāsti Mahākāvya*, chapter 5, verses 32-40, pp. 52-53.

The conversation between the two men, according to traditional sources, so impressed Jagat Singh that he underwent a conversion experience that made him the first Rajput king to ever take initiation into the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. In return, Jagat Singh gifted to the third house a village in Mewar that went by the name of Asotiya.² The donation of the village, however, seems to have been an informal arrangement between the two parties. The land was offered first and foremost as a form of tribute to the *mahārāja* of the third house and it was only after Jagat Singh's death that the grant was formally recorded and preserved by the Mewar *darbār*. When Rāj Singh succeeded Jagat Singh to the throne, he formalized the gift of Asotiya to the third house of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by recognizing the community's ownership over the land in a decree that was then inscribed on a copper plate.³

The *darbār*'s gift would prove to be an important one for the third house. Even though their harassment by the sixth house had ceased, the third house still did not have one ounce of stability. The Marāṭhās had invaded Surat causing such discord within the city that the third house was forced to seek shelter in a new location and sought the aid of the Mewar royal house under the leadership of Rāj Singh. Rāj Singh was only too happy to welcome the members of the third house into his kingdom. He was in the midst of restoring Mewar to its former glory and the presence of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in his kingdom would certainly help to serve this purpose.⁴ His father had already built strong ties with

² This account is to be found in Śāstrī's *Kāṃkāroḷī ka Itihās*, part 1, pp. 130-131.

³ Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroḷī ka Itihās*, part 1, p. 131.

⁴ This is a point admitted even by the eminent historian of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, Śāstrī, in *Kāṃkāroḷī ka Itihās*, p. 169.

the *Puṣṭi Mārga* when Braj was a thriving place of pilgrimage and those ties between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the *darbār* would only strengthen if the third house relocated permanently to Mewar. In the process, the pilgrimage traffic generated from the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s mercantile devotees in nearby Gujarat would certainly help Mewar's economy and Rāj Singh could equally get some political mileage out of his association with the third house. He could portray himself as a ruler protecting Hinduism by sheltering a branch of a prominent religious community and, in the process, increase the prestige and reputation of Mewar as a whole.

The members of the third house were temporarily settled in the village of Sadri and later Asotiya in 1671 where Rāj Singh pledged the Mewar *darbār*'s allegiance to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by taking initiation into the community and building the third house a permanent temple on the banks of Rajsamand Lake.⁵ The settlement of the third house on what was meant to be a significant part of Rāj Singh's legacy to Mewar was obviously no accident. The relocation of the third house was timed to coincide with the inauguration ceremonies for the lake. When the inauguration ceremony of the lake finally took place in 1676, it was, by contemporary accounts, a very lavish affair. Rāj Singh carried out the customary practice of weighing himself against gold and then distributing the weight in gold to his ministers and subjects. He gave alms and gifts to an estimated 46,000 *brahmins* and sent large numbers of gifts to the Rajput kingdoms of Jodhpur, Jaipur, Bikaner, Bundi, Dungarpur, and Rewa.⁶ The members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* were,

⁵ Śāstrī, *Kāmkāroli ka Itihās*, part 1, p. 147.

⁶ Ranchoḍ describes the inauguration ceremony in great detail from chapters 13 to chapters 19 of his *Rajāprasāsti Mahākāvya*, pp. 133-210.

of course, not forgotten. They moved into the temple built for them on the banks of Rajsamand and formally assumed their position as the principal source of spiritual authority for the Mewar royal house. The ties between the Mewar *darbār* and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* were now officially cemented.

5.1.1 The Establishment of the Nathdvara House

Those ties would be cemented even further when the first house would settle in Mewar with the prized image of Śrīnāthjī. Fearful that the political unrest caused by the Jāt rebellion would result in damage to the Śrīnāthjī image, the members of the first house took the decision to leave Braj in 1669 with the Śrīnāthjī image and all the wealth associated with it. When they left Braj, the first house first settled in Agra. The Śrīnāthjī image was installed in a secret shrine to protect the image from any damage along with a tiny image of Kṛṣṇa known as Navanītapriya which was originally housed in Gokul. The first house resided in Agra for roughly a year where its members clandestinely worshipped the images before leaving for Rajasthan.⁷ Mewar, however, was not the first place that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* thought of staying. The community instead visited various Rajasthani kingdoms, apparently shopping for the best place to make their permanent home. Thus the members first began by visiting the kingdom of Bundi whose ruler, Aniruddha Singh (r. 1681-1695), attempted to woo the *Puṣṭi Mārga* into staying

⁷ The details the events surrounding Śrīnāthjī's eventual move to are to be found primarily in the *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākāṭya kī Vārta*. The text, like all hagiography, blends fact with fiction, but nonetheless is an important source of information concerning the history of the first house. The details concerning their stay in Agra can be found in Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākāṭya kī Vārta*, pp. 43-51.

permanently at Kota by promising military protection should Awrangzib's troops seek to attack the kingdom.⁸

The members of the first house agreed to stay in Kota for a period of a few months but ultimately rejected the kingdom despite its hospitality. What was the reason? The then *tilkāyat*, Dāmodar, felt that the kingdom's army was not sufficiently large to protect the community in the event of a Mughal attack. Thus the first house took the Śrīnāthji and Navanītapriya images and departed for Kishangarh where the ruler of the kingdom, Mān Singh (r. 1658-1706) also beseeched Dāmodar to remain promising him that the community would be left undisturbed to attend to the needs of Navanītapriya and Śrīnāthji.⁹ The picturesque nature of Kishangarh and the hills which surrounded and protected the kingdom was still not good enough for the first house and after spending the spring and summer in the kingdom, Dāmodar and his entourage left again this time for Jodhpur. Jodhpur, however, was something of a disappointment. The ruler of the state, Jasvant Singh (r. 1637-1680), was not in the kingdom at the time the first house wound up on his doorstep, but this did not seem to deter the community. It camped outside Jodhpur in a village called Chaupasini for four months.¹⁰

It was during this four month period, that Dāmodar approached Rāj Singh in Mewar and asked for a permanent home in the kingdom. It seemed to be a reasonable request. Mewar already supported one house of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and Rāj Singh had no reason to

⁸ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthji ke Prākāṭya kī Vārā*, p. 52.

⁹ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthji ke Prākāṭya kī Vārā*, p. 53-54.

¹⁰ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthji ke Prākāṭya kī Vārā*, p. 56-57.

refuse them given the political capital he stood to make from housing a community that possessed the much revered Śrīnāthjī image. The presence of the first house in Mewar would help to further revitalize Mewar's economy, but more importantly, it would enhance his image as a ruler and religious patron by offering the *Puṣṭi Mārga* military protection. Matters were thus finalized. In 1671, the members of the first house came to Mewar and in 1672, they were resettled in a town named Sinhad, which was renamed that same year after Śrīnāthjī was installed in a large, sprawling temple complex that would serve to be the image's permanent home. The town was now called Nathdvara or "The Portal of the Lord."¹¹

5.2 Religious Networking and the Mahārājas' Involvement in Rajasthani Politics

The *mahārājas* and *tilkāyats* furthered the rapid growth of their lineages in Mewar by resorting to their longstanding practice of building a strong patronage system by cultivating very intimate relationships with members of the Rajput nobility. Since they had taken initiation from the Kankaroli house when its members were still in Braj, the Mewar *mahārājas* made it a regular practice to visit the *mahārājas* of Kankaroli and take initiation from them. In doing so, they made the public declaration that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was now the personal religion of the *darbār* and that the Kankaroli *mahārājas* would act as the principal source of spiritual instruction for the Mewar's rulers. Thus the Kankaroli *mahārājas* became a permanent fixture in the court life of the Mewar

¹¹ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākāṣya kī Vārtā*, pp. 57-58.

mahārāṇas by presiding over major events such as the coronation and sacred thread ceremonies for Mewar's princes. The Kankaroli *mahārājas*, however, were not content to keep their influence restricted only to the boundaries of Mewar. The Kankaroli *mahārājas* were frequent visitors to Jaipur where they cultivated such close relations with the Jaipur royal house that the Kankaroli *mahārājas* found themselves acting as the spiritual preceptors to the Jaipur royal house and would perform, there too, coronation ceremonies in exchange for gifts of land or monetary offerings.¹²

One sees a similar pattern occurring in the relationship between the Nathdvara house and the kingdom of Kishangarh. The state of Kishangarh was founded in 1609 by Kīśan Singh, whose descendants had made a religious commitment to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* upon its arrival in Rajasthan. The family deity of the kingdom was a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa known as Kalyanrāy, who was worshipped according to the *seva* performed in *Puṣṭi Mārga* temples which prospered under the patronage of the Kishangarh *mahārāṇas*. The Nathdvara and Kankaroli *mahārājas* both regularly visited Kishangarh, where they were extended the lodging, and the funds necessary for the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to carry out proselytizing efforts within the kingdom. Such efforts seemed to have had much success within the kingdom.¹³ In 1723, *Mahārāṇa* Sāvānt Singh's (r. 1748-1757) commitment to the tenets of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* were such that he assumed the name of Nāgaridās and

¹² Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroli kā Itihās*, pp. 251, 260. The presence of the Kankaroli *mahārājas* at the Udaipur *darbār* for ceremonial purposes seems to have begun after the death of Rāj Singh. The first evidence of the Kankaroli *mahārājas* actively embracing their roles as the *gurus* of the *darbār* is during the reign of Rāj Singh's successor Jai Singh in 1680 when the Kankaroli *mahārāja*, Brajbhūṣan I, had performed Jai Singh's coronation ceremonies.

¹³ Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage," p. 89.

began to write devotional poetry to Kṛṣṇa which, in turn, became an important source of inspiration for the Kishangarh school of painting. Numerous paintings reflected themes of Kṛṣṇaite devotion that were to be found in Nāgaridās' poetry and underlined the commitment of the Kishangarh royal family to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by depicting the kingdom's rulers worshipping the Śrīnāthjī or Kalyanrāy images.¹⁴

The same type of relationship developed between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the kingdom of Kota. The kingdom had a long standing history with the *Puṣṭi Mārga* dating back to the early seventeenth century when it had housed the image of Viṭṭhalnāth, the principal image of Kṛṣṇa worshipped by the second house of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The kingdom continued to build its ties with the *Puṣṭi Mārga* after briefly housing the Śrīnāthjī image when the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was travelling through Rajasthan and these ties became even stronger in 1719. The then ruling *mahārāja* of Kota, Bhīm Singh I, took initiation into the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and installed an image of Kṛṣṇa known as Brijnāthjī which was then deemed the tutelary deity of the kingdom and worshipped according to the rules of *Puṣṭi Mārga seva*.

The installation of Brijnāthjī was followed in 1738 by the housing of Mathuresjī, another image of Kṛṣṇa that belonged to the descendants of the first house. Thus the relationship between the Kota *mahārājas* and the Nathdvara *mahārājas* became extremely close. The Nathdvara *mahārājas* would come on festival days to perform *seva* to Brijnāthjī and Mathuresjī, a practice immortalized in court paintings commissioned by

¹⁴ Richardson, "Mughal and Rajput Patronage," p. 98-101.

the Kota *darbār*. In return, the Nathdvara *tilkāyats* received an annual sum of one lakh rupees from the Kota estates for the upkeep of the Śrināthjī temple, while the priests who cared for Mathuresjī were permitted to derive incomes from estates held in southern Rajasthan.¹⁵

The results of such religious networking would prove to be beneficial for the Nathdvara *tilkāyats*. Nathdvara was actually a *jāgīr* within Mewar that was owned by a Mewari nobleman residing in Dilwara, and encompassed a total number of thirty villages that were spread through Mewar. The land was to be exempted from taxation and was to be protected militarily by the Mewar *darbār* in times of turmoil, but the land was not construed as being a permanent gift to the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The land instead was meant to be a temporary resting place for the members of the Nathdvara house. Royal edicts issued in 1672 and 1680 by the Mewar *darbār* stipulated that Nathdvara would remain in the hands of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* until the deity would return to Braj, at which point the land would revert back to the descendants of its original owners. The terms of these documents were reaffirmed at the beginning of a new *mahārāṇa*'s reign and remained so until 1737 when the then *mahārāṇa* Jagat Singh II issued an edict formally stating that

¹⁵ The relationship between the Kota *darbār* and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* has been well-documented in two works. One is Woodman Lyon Taylor, "Visual Culture in Performative Practices: The Aesthetics, Politics, and Poetics of Visuality in Liturgical Practices of the Vallabha Sampradaya Hindu Community at Kota." (PhD, University of Chicago, 1997). The second is Norbert Peabody, "In Whose Turban Does the Lord Lie?: The Objectification of Charisma and the Objectification of Fetishism in the Hindu Kingdom of Kota," *Comparative Study of History and Society* 33 (1991), pp. 726-54. Peabody has also written some articles that touch upon the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the kingdom of Kota in his book *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Nathdvara would now be in the ownership of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and would remain with them in perpetuity.¹⁶

This would prove to be important for the Nathdvara *mahārājas*. As the permanent owners of Nathdvara and the some thirty-four villages that were gifted to *Puṣṭi Mārga* by Rajput noblemen, the Nathdvara *tilkāyats* were now able to collect revenue from the villages and then use the money to maintain the Śrīnāthjī temple. This right was later recognized formally by the Mewar *darbār* in a royal edict issued in 1778 by *mahārāṇa* Bhīm Singh.¹⁷ In this edict, the *tilkāyats* of the first house were given permission to collect dues and taxes in Nathdvara and the thirty-four villages that were attached to it. The edict then went on to take great pains to underline the absolute authority of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* over its lands by stating that all the trees, shrubs, foundations, and boundaries of these villages belonged solely to Śrīnāthjī. Similar privileges were accorded as well to the Nathdvara *tilkāyats* by the *mahārājas* of Kota and Jodhpur, the two kingdoms that were once considered by the *Puṣṭi Mārga* for their new home. Between 1715 and 1799, the Kota kings had gifted twenty villages to the Nathdvara *tilkāyats* while the kingdom of Jodhpur had gifted the Nathdvara *tilkāyats* a total number of fifteen villages between 1781 and 1786. In both cases, the lands that were gifted were again exempt from

¹⁶ Tod's *Annals and Antiquities*, part.1, vol.1 p. 442.

¹⁷ Tod, *Annals and Antiquities*, part. 1, vol. 1, p. 442.

taxation, but the *tilkāyats* could use the revenues accrued from their lands to support the expenses of the Śrīnāthjī temple.¹⁸

The year 1809, however, would prove to be a turning point in the history of Nathdvara. It was in this year that *mahārāja* Bhīm Singh (r. 1778-1828) further elaborated the rights of the Nathdvara *tilkāyats* and the extent of the powers that they held over the lands they owned. The 1809 edict began by reiterating some of the standard details found in prior land grants. The town of Nathdvara and all the estates that were gifted to the *tilkāyats* belonged solely to them, the *tilkāyats* were not to be molested, and Nathdvara and its allied estates were to be exempt from taxation. The edict went on to add that all goods imported from foreign countries for use in the Nathdvara temple were to be also exempt from duties. Furthermore, all of Nathdvara and its estates, transit duties, assay fees, the duties on precious metals, and any taxes collected from the local population were to be made as offerings to Śrīnāthjī in Nathdvara. The edict, however, went one step further by giving the Nathdvara *mahārājas* the right to grant sanctuary to individuals seeking protection within the lands owned by the *tilkāyat* and to administer justice throughout all of Nathdvara and its estates without any sort of interference from the Mewar *darbār*. Those who would seek to revoke these privileges, the grant states, would suffer a terrible punishment: being reborn as a caterpillar for sixty thousand

¹⁸ For an extremely detailed list of grants given to the Nāthdvāra house by neighbouring Rājput kingdoms see, Kṛṣṇa Jugnu, "Tilkāyatōṃ kā Bhūsvāmitva va Śasanādhikār," in *Sāhitya-Maṇḍal Nāthdvāra, Hīrak-Jayanī*, ed. Bhāgavatī Prasād Devapura (Nāthdvāra: Nāthdvāra Sāhitya Maṇḍal, 1996), pp. 226-230.

years.¹⁹ The Kankaroli house received the same type of patronage from the Mewar *darbār* and other Rajasthani kings. In 1695, *mahārāṇa* Amar Singh issued an edict acknowledging that the Kankaroli house owned the village of Asotiya and then gave the Kankaroli house a neighboring village by the name of Rajnagar. This would mark the beginning of the patronage that the Kankaroli house would receive from a sizeable number of Rajput kings who were impressed by the status of the Kankaroli *mahārājas*. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, the Mewar *darbār* gradually gave the third house ownership rights over all of Kankaroli itself, about twelve villages, and numerous patches of land in villages outside Kankaroli.

The rulers of Jaipur were equally generous. The Kankaroli house received approximately ten villages from the Jaipur royal house along with small plots of land and donations of money that were collected from those living on the lands. Donations by the Jaipur and Mewar *darbārs* were then subsequently matched by similar donations from the kingdoms of Bikaner, Kota, and Jodhpur. In all cases, the terms of the grants given to the Kankaroli house were identical to those given to the Nathdvara house: lands were to be exempt from taxation and the *mahārājas* were entitled to collect taxes and goods from villages for the worship of Dvārakādhīś.²⁰ Finally, in 1837, the Kankaroli *mahārājas*, like

¹⁹ Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 442-443.

²⁰ The Jaipur and Mewar *mahārāṇas* had developed an extremely warm and friendly relationship under the reign of the Mewar *mahārāṇa* Sangram Singh. Both kingdoms were bound together by a marriage alliance and consequently, *mahārāṇa* Savāl Jai Singh of Jaipur was a frequent visitor to Mewar. The Kankaroli house took advantage of these opportunities to build close ties with the Jaipur court which would establish a pattern of receiving land grants from the Jaipur and other Rajput kingdoms. The gifts given to the Kankaroli house are listed throughout the chapters and appendices to Śāstri's *Kāmkārōli ka Tihās*

their brethren in Nathdvara, were given complete civil and judicial control over the lands they owned in Mewar.²¹

The generosity of the *darbār* towards the Kankaroli and Nathdvara houses in the early decades of the nineteenth century had a lasting impact on the social status of both houses for in Mewari society the *mahārājas* of both houses had now become first ranking *jāgīrdārs*. They made all administrative and judicial decisions relating to their estates, they acted as councilors to the *darbār* in the sense that they provided regular spiritual advice to the *mahārāṇas*, and they only attended the royal court to preside over special occasions such as coronations or birthday celebrations. Otherwise *mahārājas* did not attend upon the *mahārāṇas* at the *darbār*. There was no need for them to do so as first ranking *jāgīrdārs* nor would the *mahārājas* ever allow such an act to occur. To be summoned to the *darbār* to attend upon the *mahārāṇa* would be tantamount to acknowledging their subordination to the *mahārāṇa* and thus compromise their status as religious leaders. A representative instead was appointed to sit at the *darbār* to represent the interests of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in affairs that pertained to the administration of Mewar. The *mahārājas* of both houses, in the meantime, could now turn their attention towards maintaining pursuits that befitted individuals of their social stature.

²¹ This occurred under the reign of *mahārāṇa* Javān Singh who gave *jāgīrdār* status to the Kankāroli *mahārāja*, Puruṣottam. See Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroli kā Itihās*, part 1, p. 271

5.2.1 Involvement in Regional Politics

One of these pursuits would be involvement in the regional politics of Rajasthan. Being both pre-eminent religious leaders, wealthy proprietors of land, and eventually members of the Rajasthani nobility not surprisingly gave the *mahārājas* of both houses an extremely high profile in Rajasthani society that would bring them to the attention of many Rajput kingdoms. One such example was the relationship between the Nathdvara *tilkāyats* and the *mahārānas* of Kota. Since Kota declared the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to be the public religion of the state and agreed to house the image of Mathuresjī, which belonged to the *tilkāyats* of Nāthdvara, both parties would find themselves intimately involved together in the regional politics of their times. In 1740, just two years after Mathuresjī's arrival in Kota, the then ruler Durjan Sāl paid for the movement of the Mathuresjī image to the pilgrimage center of Nathdvara for the celebration of the *saptasvaṛupotsava*, or the convocation as a single group of all the principal images of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The last time such an event had taken place was in 1581 when Viṭṭhalnāth had initially distributed the sacred images amongst his sons and consequently, the 1740 assemblage of images was an important milestone in the history of the community.

Timed to occur shortly after the major and popular festival marking Kṛṣṇa's birthday, the *saptasvarūpaotsava* was guaranteed to ensure the attendance of a large number of pilgrims and royal dignitaries all eager in some way to support the celebration of the images' assemblage at Nathdvara. Durjan Sāl thus sought to make as much political mileage out of the assemblage as he possibly could. He underwrote the total

costs of the convocation and even paid for the transportation costs of the principal images that were housed in other Rajasthani kingdoms after their exodus from Braj. The financial investment paid off. The celebration turned out to be a huge success that elicited the public acknowledgement of Durjan Sāl as the principal patron of the festival by the then *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara, Govardhanes.²²

The principal motive of Durjan Sāl's patronage of the *saptasvarūpotsava* was not merely to show Kota's public allegiance to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and to cement his ties with the influential *mahārāja* of Nathdvara. The festival was also a conduit by which Durjan Sāl would be able to forge political ties with the Mewar *darbār*. Durjan Sāl formally invited the then ruler of Mewar, Jagat Singh, to attend the convocation of images and used it as an opportunity to discuss political matters of mutual interest to both Mewar and Kota. Both discussed strategies to manipulate the succession struggles within the kingdoms of Bundi and Jaipur, and once Durjan Sāl publicly declared his intent to visit Nathdvara on an annual basis, both rulers agreed to meet to discuss political strategy. When Durjan Sāl visited Nathdvara the following year for his pilgrimage, he used his trip to Nathdvara as a pretext to again meet with Jagat Singh to discuss the state of their fledgling political alliance. The result was the launching of a joint invasion by the two rulers against the rival kingdoms of Bundi and Jaipur.²³

²² Taylor "Visual Culture in Performative Practice," p. 73.

²³ Taylor, "Visual Culture in Performative Practice," pp. 73-74.

The use of Nathdvara as a center for political mobilization would be repeated again decades later by Kota at yet another *saptasvarūpotsava* which was celebrated in 1822. Shortly after the signing of the 1818 paramountcy treaty, the British sought to wrest political authority of Kota from the then ruler Kisor Singh, who had been consistently resisting force from colonial authorities to abdicate the throne in favor of Zālim Singh, a rival of Kisor supported by the British. Kisor managed to maintain control over the kingdom but began a concerted effort to build an effective military resistance in 1821 to fend off impending colonial forces. On the pretext of a religious pilgrimage to Braj, Kisor used his travels outside Kota to garner political support for his cause, and returned to Kota in the same year to launch a failed attack against the British.

Kisor fled to Nathdvara knowing that his spiritual perceptor and *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara, Dāmodar, would use his power to grant sanctuary and thus give his fleeing disciple political asylum.²⁴ It was under the protection of Dāmodar that Kisor yet again planned to make another attempt to regain control of Kota. The then ruler of Mewar, Bhīm Singh, traveled to Nathdvara to aid both a political ally and fellow *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotee and, consequently, used the safe haven of Nathdvara as the base from where he began to aid Kisor in regaining his kingdom by facilitating negotiations with the British. Kisor, with the help of Dāmodar and Bhīm Singh, ultimately negotiated terms with the British that allowed him to be reinstalled on the throne of Kota in 1821.

²⁴ Taylor, "Visual Culture in Performative Practice," pp. 74-80.

The organization of the 1822 *saptasvarūpaotsava* took place during the final months of Kisor's stay in Nathdvara. In 1821, Dāmodar had already convened at Nathdvara four of the principal Puṣṭi Mārga images as part of a special religious observance known as the *Duhera Manoratha* in which all the festivals of the Puṣṭi Mārga liturgical calendar were celebrated twice during the course of the year. Given his very direct and personal relationship with the Nathdvara *mahārāja*, it was not surprising that Kisor was behind the movement of the Viṭṭhalnāth and Mathuresji images to Nathdvara for the *duhera manoratha* observance. As the remaining images arrived in Nathdvara for the final celebration of the *saptasvarūpotsava* in 1822, Kisor's hands were to be seen again in the organization of the convocation. He ensured that Kota royalty attended the festival in great numbers, and this in turn ensured the attendance of Bhīm Singh who went on to take initiation into the *Puṣṭi Mārga* at the hands of Dāmodar.²⁵

One suspects that given Kisor's continual political battles with the British, his involvement in the *saptasvarūpotsava* was motivated by something other than religious fervor. In a series of paintings commissioned to adorn the walls of the royal palace in Kota, various events in Kisor's battles with the British are depicted and then are terminated with a painting of the Nathdvara priests performing *seva*, at the 1822 *sāptasvarūpotsava* to Śrīnāthji flanked on either side by the members of the Kota and Mewar nobility. For the kingdom of Kota, which was an open sympathizer of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, the festival seemed to be viewed as an act of thanksgiving to Śrīnāthji and the

²⁵ Taylor "Visual Culture in Performative Practice," pp. 81-84.

Nathdvāra *tilkāyat* for saving the kingdom from experiencing disgrace at the hands of foreigners by uniting it with the kingdom of Mewar, the principal patron of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and one of the most influential political forces in all of Rajasthan. It would seem, then, that from the wall painting, the *saptasvarūpotsava* was not merely an expression of devotion towards Kṛṣṇa. It was also an expression of political solidarity by one of the most pre-eminent religious communities of Western India.²⁶

The Kota incident, however, would not be the only time a *tilkāyat* of Nathdvāra would shelter fugitives from the British. When the year long rebellion of Indian army officers throughout North and Central India began against the British in 1857, one of the rebellion's major figures, Tātyā Tope, found himself on the run from the British with his troop of soldiers. In 1858, Tātyā and his military entourage found themselves trekking through Rajasthan trying to evade the British who were in hot pursuit. When Tātyā arrived in Mewar, however it became apparent that it was not the best place in which to hide. The then *mahārāṇa* of Mewar, Svarūp Singh, was an openly staunch ally of the British and had promised his colonial overlords that he would enlist the military help of his *jāgīrdārs* to hunt down army officers who had supported the rebellion in Mewar and throughout Rajasthan.²⁷

²⁶ Taylor, "Visual Culture in Performative Practice," p. 85.

²⁷ For more details see, Somani, *Later Mewar*, pp. 231-238.

Svarūp Singh's pro-British stance had come to hurt the strong patriotic sensibilities of the Nathdvara *tilkāyat*, Giridhar, who saw Svarūp Singh's alliance with the British as an affront not only to Mewar but also to all of India in general. Thus Giridhar began to ignore the authority of the Mewar *darbār* by secretly granting sanctuary to fugitive rebel officers wanted by the British including Tātyā Tope. This stood in strong contrast to the attitude that the Kankaroli house took with Tātyā. When Tātyā arrived in Kankaroli, the then head of the third house, Padmāvati, permitted Tātyā to view the Dvārakdhīś image, then quickly got him out of Kankaroli. Padmāvati's motivation was probably twofold. Firstly, she feared that Tātyā's presence in Kankaroli would bring instability to the area once the British received knowledge of his whereabouts and, secondly, she was afraid of destroying the close relationship that the third house had with the *darbār*. The *mahārājas* of the third house were the official spiritual *gurus* of the *darbār* and the ties between the third house and its patrons only continued to deepen under her leadership. She probably felt no desire to jeopardize the relationship she had with the *darbār*.²⁸

In contrast, when Tātyā and his military entourage found themselves on Giridhar's doorstep at Nathdvara, the whole group of rebels was welcomed by the *tilkāyat* with open arms and great patriotic fervor. Giridhar personally escorted Tātyā to the inner sanctum of the temple for a private viewing of the Śrīnāthjī image and afterwards, Tātyā underwrote all the expenses associated with the preparation of the main food offerings for the morning worship of Śrīnāthjī. It would seem that Giridhar was quite pleased by

²⁸ Śāstrī, *Kāṃkārōḷī ka Itihās*, part 2, pp. 23-24.

Tātyā's generosity towards the temple. After the morning worship was concluded, Giridhar fed Tātyā and his soldiers the consecrated food offerings in the courtyard adjacent to his personal residence. Only when he heard the news that the British were approaching Nathdvara with a large military contingent, did Giridhar decide that, regardless of his support for Tātyā, he had no choice but to send the rebel leader away. His own contingent of military troops used to protect him was far too small to handle British troops and while he was promised military protection from the *darbār*, he could not seek aid from the *mahārāja* without revealing that he had defied the *darbār*'s position towards fugitive rebels. Giridhar thus made the necessary arrangements for Tātyā and his group to be secretly escorted out of Nathdvara to another location. Nathdvāra was thus spared the possibility of British military reprisal.²⁹

There were, however, times when the Nathdvara and Kankaroli houses found it considerably harder to fend off the possibility of military attacks on their estates. This was especially clear during the period Mewar experienced the civil war that made them vulnerable to the attacks from the Marāṭhās. Both the Kankaroli and Nathdvara *mahārājas* had developed such prominent reputations by this troubled period of time in Mewar's history, that they found themselves being approached in some fashion by the warring factions in the civil war. This was certainly the case with the Kankaroli house whose head at the time of the civil war, Brajbhūṣaṇ II, found himself in the difficult

²⁹ Manohar Kothari, "Svādhincetā Go. Ti Śrī Giridhar Ji Aur Tātya Tope" in 38 Me Rajasthan Virodh in *Sāhitya-Manḍal Nathdvara, Hirak-Jayanṭi Granth*, ed. Bhāgāvati Prasād Devapura (Nāthdvāra: Nathdvāra Sāhitya Maṇḍal, 1996), pp. 252-253

position of trying to protect the safety of the Kankaroli estate by adopting a stance of political neutrality. This was Brajbhūṣaṇ's approach in 1770 when he found himself faced with the prospect of Kankaroli being overrun by Nāgā *sādhus*. The Nāgās were militant holy men who were hired as mercenaries by the faction in the civil war hostile to the then ruling *mahārāṇa* of Mewar, Ari Singh. The Nāgās had come to Kankaroli with the intent of hunting down a fugitive associated with the *darbār* who decided to hide with his military entourage within the precincts of the Kankaroli estate

Brajbhūṣaṇ was now forced to find a way to prevent a military battle that would have caused great damage to Kankaroli. He began to engage in negotiations between the two parties, capitalizing as much as possible on the goodwill and respect that he enjoyed from both sides in the conflict. In his conversations with Brajbhūṣaṇ, the fugitive named Fateh Singh made it clear that he had no desire to cause trouble within the estate and that he would desist from military action and leave Kankaroli as quickly as possible.

Brajbhūṣaṇ then entered into talks with the chief monk of the Nāgā order and tried to persuade his Nāgā counterpart that an attack would bring about needless destruction and that their intended target would make good on the promise to lay down his arms. Thus the Nāgās finally agreed to a ceasefire based solely on upon Brajbhūṣaṇ's promise that Fateh Singh would not engage in any armed conflict. Fateh Singh was faithful to his word. He took a final glimpse of the Dvārkaḍhī's image and departed unscathed. Brajbhūṣaṇ thus managed narrowly to avert a major battle within the precincts of Kankaroli.³⁰

³⁰ Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroli kā Itihās*, part 1, pp. 195-197.

Brajbhūṣaṇ III, the grandson of Brajbhūṣaṇ II, would find himself in similar situations during the first decade of the nineteenth century. When the Marāṭhā chief, Jasvant Holkar, started his devastating attacks upon Mewar, in 1802, he and his army raided Kankaroli, demanding an exorbitant tribute from Brajbhūṣaṇ that the Kankaroli *mahārāja* could not possibly pay. Brajbhūṣaṇ ultimately staved off the Marāṭhās by giving them jewelry belonging to his daughters and wife, as well as gold and silver articles from within the temple.³¹ As humiliating as the experience was for Brajbhūṣaṇ, he never opted to leave Kankaroli but instead made himself increasingly vulnerable to attacks from marauding forces seeking to sack the temple. Shortly after the Marāṭhā attack, Kankaroli narrowly escaped being attacked by a rebellious Mewari tribe known as the Mers and, in 1810, Brajbhūṣaṇ managed to make peace with Amīr Khān, a Muslim ally of Jasvant Holkar who was also looting Mewar. It is not exactly clear what happened between Amīr Khān and Brajbhūṣaṇ but their meeting was so successful that Jasvant repented having plundered the Kankaroli temple eight years earlier. Jasvant, along with Amīr Khan, engraved two inscriptions on the temple forbidding future Marāṭhās to sack the Kankaroli house.³²

Nathdvara, however, did not fare so well during the political unrest that befell Mewar at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The riches that made the Nathdvara temple so famous made it a sure target for Jasvant's armies in 1802, but the *tilkāyat* of the time,

³¹ Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroli ka Itihās*, part 1, pp. 243-246.

³² Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroli ka Itihās*, part 1, pp. 249-252.

Giridhar, did not follow the example of Kankaroli *mahārājas* and attempt to negotiate a peace with his opponents. Given the extreme gravity of the situation and his inability to effectively defend Nathdvara, Giridhar sought the help of his patron, the *mahārāṇa* of Mewar, who was obliged under the edicts issued to the Nathdvara temple to provide him with military aid. Maharana Bhīm Singh, in response, moved the temple images and wealth to a new building in Udaipur just before Jasvant sacked the temple and attempted to extort a tribute from Nathdvara's residents.³³

Udaipur, however, would not prove to be a safe haven for the Nathdvara house. The political conditions in Udaipur continued to deteriorate so rapidly that after ten months in the city, the Nathdvara house moved to a densely forest covered area known as Ghasiyar. They built a new temple for Śrīnāthjī and resided in Ghasiyar for a period of six years before they finally returned home to Nathdvara in 1808.³⁴ The return of the first house to Nathdvara in 1808 would be equally important for the Kankaroli house. It was an indication that stability was returning to Mewar after decades of political mayhem, and that both houses could try to focus again on religious matters rather than military ones. Not surprisingly, during the Marāṭhā wars, pilgrimage traffic had slowed down considerably and the *darbār*, which had become so occupied with the more pressing matter of political survival during the civil war period, had no interest in matters of religious patronage. The end of the war now allowed for a revival in pilgrimage traffic and for a more steady flow of religious patronage that manifested itself most generously

³³ Somani, *Later Mewar*, pp. 112-113.

in the post-civil war period in the elevation of the Nathdvara and Kankaroli *mahārājas* to the position of first rank *jagirdārs*.

5.3 Conflicts Between the Nathdvara and Kankaroli House

The first commitment of the *mahārājas* were of course to matters of devotion, but at times devotion to Kṛṣṇa could be the last matter on the minds of the members of the Vallabha family. *Seva* to Śrīnāthjī was to be shared equally by all the seven houses of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, but control had always been maintained in the hands of the first house that had asserted its rights over the Śrīnāthjī image with the backing of the Mughal *darbār*. Imperial authority, however, seemed to matter very little to certain members within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. This was certainly the case between members of the third and first houses. When the first house left Braj for Agra after the Jāt rebellions, they settled themselves for a period of time in a small town where they found themselves challenged by Brajrāy, a member of the third house who was the grandson of Viṭṭhalnāth's third son. Brajrāy and his family, accompanied by a military force, asserted his right to perform *seva* to Śrīnāthjī. The entire family of the *tilkāyat* Viṭthalrāy quickly capitulated at the sight of the military force, gave up their rights over the first house to Brajrāy, and then found themselves exiled to a location well away from the image. For an entire month the first house did nothing to oppose Brajrāy's assumption to power until the *tilkāyat*'s son, Govind, burst into the Śrīnāthjī shrine during morning services to confront Brajrāy. Govind, right in front of the Śrīnāthjī image, took out a dagger and threatened to kill

³⁴ Śāstrī, *Kāmkārōṭī kā Itihāsā* part 1, pp. 252-254.

Brajrāy by stabbing him in the stomach after which, Govind declared, he would use the knife to commit suicide in front of Śrīnāthjī. The threat seemed to work. Brajrāy left for Agra giving up control back to the *tilkāyat*.³⁵

This type of conflict was not new within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The attempted use of violence in struggles for authority were already a part of the community's history in Braj and the struggle for authority between Govind and Brajrāy was an indication that all was not always well in the Vallabha family. The success of festivals like the *saptasvarūpotsavas* would leave one with the impression that the festivals were one grand and joyous family reunion of the Vallabha dynasty, but behind this façade was a picture of *mahārājas* constantly squabbling amongst each other due to personality conflicts and disputes over issues of prestige. This was certainly the case with the 1822 *saptasvarūpotsava*, which almost did not materialize due to the constant infighting within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, particularly between the Nathdvara and Kankaroli houses. The two houses had always maintained an amicable relationship which was cemented by the yearly celebration of the Annakut festival when the Nathdvara *tilkāyat* would make a formal invitation to the Kankaroli house asking for the presence of Dvārkādhīś to partake in the special celebrations with Śrīnāthjī.

Things, however, took a downslide in the mid-eighteenth century under the reign of the Kankaroli *mahārāja*, Brajbhūṣaṇ III, due to the continued enmity of the third house with the sixth house which was based in the city of Surat. Brajbhūṣaṇ appealed to a

³⁵ This remarkable story is recounted in Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākṛṭya kī Vārṇa*, pp. 47-50.

council of orthodox *brahmins* in Poona and to the judgement of the Nathdvara *tilkāyat* Giridhar for support in assuming control over the sixth house. Giridhar ruled against Brajbhūṣaṇ's takeover attempt, which was then finally stymied by the *brahmin* scholars in Poona. Matters continued to worsen between 1813 and 1816 when an argument between the two houses over the control of an estate named Brajbhūṣaṇpura nearly brought the two sides into armed conflict ³⁶

When the Nāthdvara house began to plan the *saptasvarūpotsava* celebrations, it faced a formidable challenge. The success of the festival was dependant on the cooperation of all seven houses of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, but the ongoing personality conflicts between the various heads made the initial planning stages so difficult that the British Political Agent, James Tod, was summoned by the now *tilkāyat* Dāmodar to act as mediator. In *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Tod describes how the responsibility fell upon his shoulders to reconcile the personal animosities between the various *mahārājas* in order to assure the presence of all the required images at the festival. Afterwards Tod came to face more pressure from forces outside the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Rajput rulers whose kingdoms housed the images that resided outside Mewar wanted Tod to ensure that no *mahārāja* would be bribed into relocating their image to another kingdom. According to Tod, rulers feared that the loss of a principal *Puṣṭi Mārga* image would result in the loss of sanctity, dignity, and prosperity for their kingdoms. ³⁷

³⁶ Śāstrī, *Kāmākārolī kā Itihāsā*, part 1, pp. 235-238, 260-261.

³⁷ Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, vol. 1, pp. 436-437.

The difficulties that Tod faced were made all the more difficult by tensions between the Kankaroli and Nathdvara houses. Even with Tod's efforts to aid in the organization of the *saptasvarūpotsava*, the entire festival was nearly derailed on the eve of the event by the Kankaroli *mahārāja*, Puruṣottam, because of the long standing grudge he was nursing against the Nathdvara house over the control of the Brajbhūṣaṇpura estate and the refusal of the Nathdvara house to recognize Puruṣottam's authority over the sixth house in Surat. Puruṣottam thus refused to bring the Dvārkādhīś image to Nathdvara for the festival unless Dāmodar agreed to recognize Puruṣottam's authority over the sixth house and acknowledge his ownership to the long-disputed Brajbhūṣaṇpura estate. Furthermore, Puruṣottam demanded that upon his arrival in Nathdvara for the *saptasvarūpotsava*, his presence had to be formally announced in public with a full recitation of honors and titles that he had acquired over his tenure as *mahārāja* of the third house. Dāmodar at first resisted and it was only after the Mewar *darbār* had failed in its attempt to change Puruṣottam's mind that Dāmodar caved into two of Puruṣottam's demands. Kankaroli received control of Brajbhūṣaṇpura and Puruṣottam was regally announced upon his arrival for the festival in Nathdvara. Dāmodar thus narrowly saved the *saptasvarūpotsava* from disaster.³⁸

The *saptasvarūpotsava*, however, did not do much to ease the tensions between the two houses. Puruṣottam decided not to send the Dvārkādhīś image for the annual Annakut festival at Nathdvara and celebrated the festival at Kankaroli instead until 1832.

³⁸ Śāstrī, *Kāṁkāroli kā Itihās*, part 1, pp. 289-292.

When relations somewhat warmed a year later between the two houses they celebrated together Annakut festival for a period of ten years. Relations, however, between the two houses continued to fluctuate. Kankaroli boycotted the Annakut festival from 1843 to 1845, after which point the houses again celebrated the festival together for another fifteen years. The tradition was yet again discontinued between 1862 and 1875. The two houses had a falling out arising from the wedding celebrations of the Kankaroli *mahārāja* Giridharlāl IV in 1862 and relations hit an all time low in 1866 when Giridharlāl IV and the *tilkāyat* Giridhar entered into a heated conflict over the manager of the Kankaroli temple.

The manager was a former employee of Giridhar, who sought refuge in Kankaroli after Giridhar, in an apparent fit of anger, tried to jail him in Nathdvara. Giridharlāl IV gave the fugitive employee shelter and hired him as the manager of the Kankaroli temple thus upsetting the Nathdvara *tilkāyat*. Giridhar spurned overtures from the stepmother of Giridharlāl IV, Padmāvatī, to mend fences between the two houses and when Giridharlāl attempted to appear in Nathdvara with the Dvārkādhīs image for the Annakut festival, Giridhar prevented him at the town limits from entering Nathdvara. Matters finally resolved themselves a year later, but it did little to change the relationship between the two houses.³⁹

³⁹ Śāstrī, *Kāṃkāroli kā Itihās*, part 2, pp. 28-30. See below for more details about Padmāvatī's reign as the head of the third house.

5.4 Legitimizing the Authority of the Tilkāyats

The conflicts between the Nathdvara and Kankaroli houses were indicative of the long standing challenges that the *tilkāyats* had to face by those within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* who questioned their authority to hold exclusive rights to perform *seva* to Śrīnāthjī. The *tilkāyats* certainly had a strong argument in favor of their control over the image. The first house, since the time of Viṭṭhalnāth, had certain pre-eminence over the other lineage holders within the community due to their possession of the Śrīnāthjī image and their position was enforced by none other than Shāhjahān himself. The *Śrīnāthji ke Prākṛtya kī Vārtā*, also goes about the task of underlining Śrīnāthjī's favor upon the *tilkāyats* in its account of the squabbles between the *tilkāyats* and the other lineage holders of the community. Thus the disputes over the control for Śrīnāthjī that occurred in Braj and the near murder-suicide incident revolving around Govind and Brajrāy are all depicted with the purpose of placing the *tilkāyats* in a favorable light. The dispute in Braj that has to be arbitrated by the Mughals is resolved in favor of the first house because Shāhjahān's judgement is ordered by Śrīnāthjī through a dream.⁴⁰ In a similar vein when Govind and other members of the first house are temporarily ousted by Brajrāy, the *Prākṛtya kī Vārtā* asserts that the entire episode was pre-ordained by Viṭṭhalnāth before his death, and then describes how Śrīnāthjī refuses to accept Brajrāy's *seva*. Śrīnāthjī, instead, appears

⁴⁰ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākṛtya kī Vārtā*, p. 35.

everyday to the exiled members of the first house who, like the milkmaids of Braj, are in the throes of the anguish because of their separation from Kṛṣṇa.⁴¹

The *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā*, however, goes even one step further by insisting on the legitimacy of the first house to perform *seva* to Kṛṣṇa even when the *tilkāyat* is not always vigilant concerning the observation of *seva* regulations. This is underlined in the *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā* through two events, one of which revolves around the *mahārāja* Puruṣottam of Surat, who desires to adorn Śrīnāthjī with gold-threaded socks. Daujī, the *tilkāyat* who brought Śrīnāthjī to Mewar, decrees, however, that Śrīnāthjī should be adorned with the socks only in the morning time in accordance with rules of *seva*. When Puruṣottam bribes the temple manager to let the socks stay on the image into the afternoon before Daujī arrives for the afternoon services, Śrīnāthjī expresses his discomfort with the socks and thus his refusal to accept them from Puruṣottam for he had defied the authority of Daujī.⁴²

The *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā* then goes on to outline another incident when Daujī unwittingly commits a breach in *seva* when he fails to place an appropriate rug in front of Śrīnāthjī after the morning services are complete. Daujī is then gently reprimanded by Harirāy, the community's most revered theologian, who reminds him that no such lapse should ever occur in *seva*. Daujī is the most senior member of the community, and therefore the right to perform *seva* is only given to him by Śrīnāthjī and must be carried

⁴¹ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākāṭya kī Vārtā*, pp. 47-48

⁴² Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākāṭya kī Vārtā*, pp. 72-74.

out in accordance with what was prescribed by Viṭṭhalnāth.⁴³ Thus the message from these incidents involving *seva* violations and familial disputes over control over Śrīnāthjī is extremely clear. Regardless of familial opposition or a lack of vigilance in the performance of *seva*, the *tilkāyat*'s authority to have full control over the performance of *seva* to Śrīnāthjī comes directly from no other person but Śrīnāthjī himself.

Śrīnāthjī's authority is the reason also given in the *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā* for legitimating the relationship between the house of Mewar and the members of the first house. The text details how the establishment of Nathdvara was divinely ordained by Śrīnāthjī and Viṭṭhalnāth and manifested itself in the heroic efforts made by the Nathdvara house and its patron, Rāj Singh to protect the Hindu faith from the persecution of Awrangzīb. The *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā* seeks to accomplish this by recounting how the relationship between the Mewar and the first house had its origins during the time of Viṭṭhalnāth. Viṭṭhalnāth, the text states, was passing through Mewar and resided in a beautiful area where he decided that Śrīnāthjī would stay after his passing. The site, the text states, would be the future Nathdvara and it was on this site where Viṭṭhalnāth supposedly received and blessed Mewar's *mahārāṇa* Udai Singh, the *mahārāṇa*'s wife, and the princess Ajab Kūvari all of whom took initiation from Viṭṭhalnāth.⁴⁴

⁴³ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākāṭya kī Vārtā*, pp. 64-45.

⁴⁴ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī ke Prākāṭya kī Vārtā*, pp. 37-38. Ajab Kūvari was the daughter of Rāj Singh and had died in 1707 after committing *sati* on her husband's funeral pyre. Thus it seems most improbable that Viṭṭhalnāth had ever met the princess. See Śyamaldās, *Vir Vinod*, vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 447.

This relationship would in turn solidify the ties between the *tilkāyats* and royal house of Mewar. Śrīnāthjī would visit Mewar daily and play dice with Ajab Kūvari declaring that after Vitthalnāth's death he would reside in Mewar permanently. The political unrest in Braj is consequently explained as a mere pretext created by Śrīnāthjī in order to fulfill his statement to the Mewar princess. Thus the *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā* depicts certain members of the first house adorning themselves in military attire and setting up guards to protect themselves from the Mughals who are pursuing them as they flee from Agra to Rajasthan. In this context, the *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā* presents Rāj Singh, not surprisingly, in a most favorable light. When Rāj Singh is approached by the *tilkāyat* Daujī to shelter the fleeing religious community, he expresses his fear of Mughal reprisal but he courageously decides to house the community at the insistence of his mother. The Queen Mother convinces her son that the patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was a matter of honor for the kingdom and to protect Mewar and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* from a possible Mughal attack would be an act of sacrifice for his country and his faith.⁴⁵

The inspiration behind this episode in the *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā* seems to be the well-known Mewari saying that "God protects those who firmly carry out their duty" (*jo dharm dīḍh rakhe, ko tihī rakhe kartār*). In the *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā*, Rāj Singh's commitment to protecting his faith is ultimately rewarded with the permanent presence of Śrīnāthjī in Mewar which is a theme which becomes amplified through folk stories which

⁴⁵ Harirāy, *Śrīnāthjī Prākāṭya kī Vārtā*, pp. 57-58.

establishment of Nathdvāra in 1672, and Awrangzīb's attack upon Mewar in 1679.

These narratives present Awrangzīb's attack upon Mewar as a direct result of Rāj Singh's elopement with Cārumāfi and describe how the fragmented Rajput kingdoms join together to mount a valiant fight against the Mughals under the watchful eye of Śrīnāthji. The same theme that is found in the *Prākāṭya kī Vārtā* is thus reiterated yet again in these narratives: Rāj Singh's commitment to his duty to protect the forlorn and protect the honor of his subjects, has assured the kingdom Śrīnāthji's perpetual protection.⁴⁶

5.4.1 The Relationship between Rulers and Puṣṭi Mārga Mahārājas in Devotional Literature

These narratives set the foundation for the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s conception of the ideal relationship that should ensue between a *mahārāja* and a ruler who has taken initiation into the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, contains a number of stories about devotees who are listed as rulers of small regional kingdoms in Western and Central India who were devotees of Viṭṭhalnāth. and while the historical value of the stories may be in doubt, one still sees the model for an ideal *Puṣṭi Mārga* kingdom. The ruler, having been initiated into the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, enshrines an image of Kṛṣṇa in a temple, makes it the titular ruler of his kingdom, and is advised in matters of *seva* by

⁴⁶ These tales are recounted in an article written by Surinder Singh. Cakra, "Prabhu Śrīnāthji kī Mevād par Kṛpa," in *Sāhitya-Manḍal Nāthdvāra, Hirak-Jayantī Granth*, ed. Bhāgavatī Prasād Devapura (Nāthdvāra: Nāthdvāra Sahitya Mandal, 1996), pp. 223-225.

appropriate *brahmins*.⁴⁷ The *vārtā* literature also goes on to state that devotion to Kṛṣṇa is fine and extremely important for a ruler who is a member of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, but not to the point that it keeps the ruler from fulfilling his worldly responsibilities. Conducting the affairs of state with faith in Kṛṣṇa and with the blessings the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārāja* will suffice to ensure a prosperous kingdom.

These themes come across clearly in two stories about two of Viṭṭhalnāth's devotees. One is the story of a Gujarati noble who comes to Viṭṭhalnāth to take initiation from him, but, given his inability to perform *seva* on his own, is assigned two *brahmins* well versed in *Puṣṭi Mārga seva* by Viṭṭhalnāth. Both *brahmins* aid the noble in the art of *seva* until he is finally capable of performing it to the point that he becomes immersed in nothing else. This image is further reinforced in the story of one noble named Mān Singh. Mān Singh takes initiation into the *Puṣṭi Mārga* from Viṭṭhalnāth and becomes so involved in *seva* that when his one hundred and eight wives refuse to be initiated, he abandons them and marries another woman who becomes his helpmate in *seva*. Mān Singh, aided by his wife, chief minister, and other individuals well-versed in *seva*, becomes so immersed in his religious life that his life as ruler is completely structured by the dictates of *Puṣṭi Mārga* worship. He only attends to administrative details in between periods of worship, he personally performs *seva* to his image of Kṛṣṇa, feeds Vaiṣṇavas, and of course expresses his gratitude for the good fortune he experiences by making regular donations of wealth to his *guru* Viṭṭhalnāth. One sees a somewhat similar pattern

⁴⁷ The stories about local chieftains and rulers who are said to have become members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* are all found in the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārta*. See *vārtas* 62, 63, 66, 104, 123, 177, 183, 185, and

in the story of Rājā Bhīm whose dedication to *seva* is such that his mind is constantly immersed in thinking about Gokul, the home of his *guru*, Viṭṭhalnāth, who regularly receives the generous donations of a Bhīm who is grateful for his spiritual progress.

A fuller picture of the ideal *Puṣṭi Mārga* ruler is found in the story of Prithivi Singh, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* royal patron who ruled over the Rajasthani kingdom of Bikaner. Prithivi Singh (1549-1600) in many ways represents the image of the ideal ruler in *vārtā* literature, for he carries out his appointed duties in his public life while engaging in devotion to Kṛṣṇa in his personal life. Prithivi Singh is depicted wearing religious garments indicating his affiliation to the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, he meditates completely upon Kṛṣṇa and Viṭṭhalnāth, and expresses his devotion and humility to both of them in song and poetry. Yet, when necessary, Prithivi Singh fights on the battlefield and emerges as a victorious warrior because of his firm devotion to Kṛṣṇa and Viṭṭhalnāth.⁴⁸

This image also comes through in the narrative concerning Askaran, an accomplished warrior who wants to give up his kingly duties in order to engage in constant mental meditation upon Kṛṣṇa. Askaran, however, is told by Kṛṣṇa in a dream to desist from giving up his kingly duties. Shortly after, he vanquishes an arriving army and then immediately lapses into a state of mental absorption upon the form of Kṛṣṇa.⁴⁹ Hence the stories of Askaran, Prithivi Singh, and the other nobles in the *Do Sau Bāvan*

237. See especially *vārtās* 63, 104, 123, and 237 as well as Taylor's discussion of some of these *vārtā* stories in "Visual Culture in Performative Practice," pp. 59-61.

⁴⁸ For the *vārtā* of Prithivi Singh, see Harirāy, *Do Sau Bāvan*, vol. 3, *vārtā* 237, pp. 283-286.

⁴⁹ For the *vārtā* of Askaran, see Harirāy, *Do Sau Bāvan*, vol. 2, *vārtā* 123, pp. 181-200.

Hence the stories of Askaran, Prithivi Singh, and the other nobles in the *Do Sau Bāvan* as well as the story of Rāj Singh in the *Prakāṭya kī Vārtā* all emphasize that these rulers did not achieve worldly success purely by their own efforts, but because they were favored with the grace of Kṛṣṇa as mediated through Viṭṭhalnāth. It would seem then that from the perspective of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, the ultimate source of political and spiritual success in the state was not the *mahārāṇa*, but his *Puṣṭi Mārga guru*.

To what extent, however, was this borne out by reality? By the nineteenth century, the Mewar royal house had embraced its position as the protector of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* for over a century, believing that the community was a source of blessings that would ensure the spiritual and material well-being of the state as well as its political well-being by enhancing its prestige amongst other Rajput states. Thus the Mewar *mahārāṇas* gladly deferred to the spiritual authority of the *mahārājas* by providing for their material needs and giving them unfettered authority to run the affairs of their temples. In the case of the Kankaroli house, their generous patronage allowed them to solidify their position as the official spiritual preceptors of the Mewar royal house. When Kankaroli was turned into an official *jāgīr* in the early nineteenth century, the influence of the house continued to rise as it expanded its patronage network to encompass other Rajput kingdoms that were equally generous in their donations of land.

Thus the Kankaroli house had much reason to be grateful to the *darbār* and the two sides became increasingly closer during the course of the nineteenth century largely due to Padmāvatī. Padmāvatī was married to Puruṣottam, the ninth *mahārāja* of Kankaroli

who died suddenly without a male heir. Thus having no children of her own, Padmāvati became the head of the third house by enlisting the support of Svarūp Singh to get around the traditional custom of primogeniture within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Padmāvati would eventually return the favor in kind. When Padmāvati decided, in 1850, to adopt a male heir from another branch of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in order to continue the lineage of the third house, she forced the young boy's family to sign an agreement with two conditions. Firstly, the new heir apparent would submit to her authority till he came of age and, secondly, the new heir would always maintain his loyalty to the *darbār*.⁵⁰

When the new heir, Giridharlāl, died unexpectedly in 1872 at the age of 31 without an heir, Padmāvati adopted under similar circumstances another male child from another lineage within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The twelve-year-old child, Bālkrṣṇa, was made head of the third house with the backing of the *darbār* in 1878 again with the understanding that Padmāvati would continue to act as regent until Bālkrṣṇa came of age. Afterwards, Padmāvati then expressed her loyalty once again to the *darbār* by signing the 1878 agreement that stabilized relations between the Mewari nobility and *mahārāṇa* Sajjan Singh.⁵¹ This long-standing loyalty of the third house towards the *darbār* may help to explain its lack of political involvement in regional politics. The third house maintained a stance of political neutrality throughout the Marāṭha invasions, refused to act as a collaborator with fleeing mutineers, nor was inclined to broker political deals within the

⁵⁰ Śāstrī, *Kāmkāroḥi kā Itihās* part 2, pp. 2-3.

⁵¹ Śāstrī, *Kāmkāroḥi kā Itihās*, part 2, pp. 5-6, 10.

material well-being and was willing to acquiesce to the political authority of the *darbār* in order to maintain the financial stability and social prestige that came with royal patronage.

The same could be said for the Nathdvara house. No matter how much *Puṣṭi Mārga* hagiography would like to assert the superiority of the *mahārājas* over their secular rulers, the reality was that the Nathdvara house too was dependent on the *darbār* for its survival. The *darbār* sheltered the first house after its two year trek through Rajasthan, protected the Nathdvara house during the bleak period of the Mewar civil war, and gave Nathdvara a new lease on life in the post civil war period by giving it *jāgīr* status so the temple and the *tilkāyats* would never have to want materially. The *darbār*'s continued commitment to aid the temple in its times of need was, in other words, imperative to the survival of the Nathdvara house. Without the continued support and protection of the *darbār*, the very existence of Nathdvara could come into question.

This could be no clearer than in the events that befell Nathdvara in 1832. The *tilkāyat* at the time was Govind II, the adopted son of the *tilkāyat* Dāmodar II, whose death made the five year old Govind the *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara until his demise at the mere age of 23. Thus the majority of Govind's reign was in fact carried out by his step-mother Lakṣmī, who was experiencing much difficulty in handling the administration of the daily *seva* for Śrīnāthjī. The temple progressively found itself in a deepening financial crisis, but Lakṣmī found herself without any royal support. The political confusion reigning in the *darbār* with the ascent of Javān Singh cast doubt upon the guarantee of

assured royal patronage; consequently Lakṣmī seems to have balked at the idea of approaching the *darbār* because she was probably unwilling to give the administration of the temple to a very weakened *darbār*. She wrote a letter in 1828 to Puruṣottam, the *mahārāja* of Kankaroli, in 1828 begging him to aid her in the administration of the temple. If he did not, she would ask for either British intervention or the intervention of other Rajput chieftains in the administration of the temple and its estates.⁵²

Puruṣottam agreed to maintain the expenditures of the temple before finally giving the position back to Lakṣmī in 1831, who now had no means of support. Puruṣottam departed from the temple administration while the Mewar *darbār* still remained unable to fulfill its traditional function of protecting Nathdvara. Lakṣmī, unable to fend for herself, then took the extraordinary step of petitioning British authorities in Ajmer on behalf of the thirteen year old Govind to establish Nathdvara as a separate, political entity from the *darbār*. It would seem that by establishing Nathdvara as an independent state, it would be possible for her to seek aid from the British by dealing with them directly without ever having to use the *darbār* as her intermediary.

The Nathdvara house thus sent an envoy named Rādḥakṛṣṇan to the British political agent in Ajmer asking him for permission to establish Nathdvara's separate identity from Mewar. The British, however, were not amused. This matter was of little significance for British interests and did not warrant their attention. Colonial authorities thus sent

⁵² The letter is reprinted in Śāstrī, *Kāmkārōlī kā Itihās*, part 1, p. 295.

Rādhākṛṣṇan back to Nathdvara instructing him that the Nathdvara house should make its case in front of Javān Singh and the rest of the Mewar *darbār*.⁵³ Needless to say, Rādhākṛṣṇan returned to Nathdvara humiliated and Nathdvara's attempt to separate from Mewar ended in failure. The Nathdvara house never tried again during the reign of Govind. The temple soon drove itself into near bankruptcy until all of its debts were miraculously paid off in 1840. The aid came, however, from a wealthy anonymous devotee and not the *darbār*.

5.5 Conclusion

The relationship between the Mewar *darbār* and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* on the surface seemed to be one of mutual dependence. The *darbār*'s support for the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was rooted in its theological commitment to the community that had existed well before the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s exodus from Braj, but there were other reasons for the settlement of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Mewar. The settlement of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* came to be a key component in Rāj Singh's envisioned cultural reconstruction of Mewar for it would aid his ailing economy and restore Mewar's former glory as the pre-eminent power in Rajasthan. The kingdom was famed for its defiance of Mughal authority and – as both oral tradition and the devotional literature of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* indicate – the *darbār*'s patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* helped to enhance this image as the fearless defenders of Hindu *dharma*. Rāj Singh's successors would continue to cultivate that image through its increasingly lavish patronage of the community, and took advantage of the pre-eminence of the Nathdvara

⁵³ G.H Ojha, *Udaypur Rājya kā Itihās*, vol. 2, p. 728.

house to increase its influence in the regional politics of Rajasthan by building a military alliance with Kota that would be used to attack rival kingdoms. The patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* thus came to reap significant political rewards for the *darbār*.

The *Puṣṭi Mārga*, of course, equally stood to gain much from accepting the patronage of the *darbār*. The community had built up its prestige in Braj and Gujarat by its willingness to work within the existing political and economic structures of the times and build ties with individuals whose need for security and prestige would be compatible with the overall theological outlook of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The community continued this trend when it was settled in Rajasthan. When the first and third houses began to experience instability during the late seventeenth century due to political turmoil and internal squabbling, both houses found themselves considering Rajput patronage based upon whether or not their potential patron could guarantee them full material and physical security. Both houses ultimately chose Mewar not only because it was theologically sympathetic to the community, but also because it was willing to heap generous amounts of patronage upon both houses and to protect them militarily in times of political instability.

Once the *Puṣṭi Mārga* settled in Mewar, they again began to build a patronage network in Rajasthan in a manner that was strikingly similar to their process of religious networking in Braj. In Braj, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* established Govardhan as the focal point for pilgrimage and from there spread outwards, slowly acquiring numerous tracts of land through the help of a patronage network that was built by directly approaching the members of North India's economic and political elite. What emerged was the

transformation of the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* into wealthy landowners whose position as religious leaders afforded them state protection. The process in Mewar was not all that different. Nathdvara and Kankaroli were established as centers of pilgrimage for members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* community and from that point onwards, the Kankaroli and Nathdvara *mahārājas* again began the process of building a patronage network. They cultivated ties with members of the Rajput nobility, accrued income that came from their devotees in Gujarat, and transformed themselves again into wealthy landowners whose status as religious leaders again afforded them special privileges and protection from the state.

The reality, however, was that there was a certain ambiguity surrounding the relations between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the Mewar *darbār*. The bidding war for the *Śrīnāthji* image in the late seventeenth century and the fears expressed to Tod during the 1822 *saptasvarūpotsava* about the potential loss of images from kingdoms was indicative of how the *mahārājas* recognized the value of using sacred images as bargaining chips in their relationship with their patrons. The mere mention of a *svārūpa* departing from Mewar or any other kingdom was enough to cause anxiety amongst rulers whose financial stability was dependant upon the generation of pilgrimage traffic. If tensions were to become severe between the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the *darbār*, the *mahārājas* still had alternate sources of income that came from the mercantile community and from other estates that were in kingdoms outside Mewar. At the same time, however, it is difficult to ignore that the continued prosperity of the *mahārājas* was highly dependent on regional political stability. It was the political instability in Braj that forced the

community to move to Rajasthan where the Mewar civil war and Nathdvara's failed attempt at secession underlined yet again how political instability within the region could serve to have dire consequences for the continued prosperity of the *mahārājas*.

The bestowal of *jāgīr* status on Kankaroli and Nathdvara would come to have a lasting impact on the relationship between the *darbār* and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in two very different ways. The bestowal of *jāgīr* status upon the Kankaroli *mahārājas* may have turned them into high ranking members of the Mewari nobility and drew the Kankaroli house closer to the *darbār* to the point that the Kankaroli house willingly accepted political subordination to the *darbār* in order to maintain its material well-being. Matters were not quite the same in the case of Nathdvara. The Mewar civil war was a good example of how Nathdvara house was also dependant upon the *darbār* for its well-being, but the Nathdvara *mahārājas* slowly came to use their position as upper-ranking *jāgīrdārs* to assert their power in the realm of Rajasthani politics. This was clearly illustrated by the celebration of the 1822 *saptasvarūpotsava* and also by Giridhar's decision to harbor mutineers who participated in the 1857 uprising against colonial authority.

Giridhar's response to the *darbār*'s pro-British stance during the mutiny would mark the beginning of a major shift in the relationship between the *darbār* and Nathdvara that revolved around the peculiar situation of the *tilkāyat* holding both the dual status of *jāgīrdār* and *guru*. When the *darbār* had elevated the Kankaroli and Nathdvara estates to the ranks of *jāgīrs*, it promised both houses that respect would be given to them as spiritual guides and that, as high-ranking *jāgīrdārs*, all judicial and administrative matters

could be taken by the *mahārājas* without any interference from the *darbār*. Thus, being a first rank *jāgīrdār* certainly had its privileges but even a noble of such a high stature was still subject to the conditions of the 1818 and 1878 treaties that were signed to strengthen relations between the *darbār* and the Mewari nobility. Agreeing to both treaties meant that the first rank *jāgīrdārs*, like all other *jāgīrdārs*, would agree to abide by the conditions of the treaties that made it clear that they were not to harbor criminals within their estates and that the authority of the *darbār* would be respected.

Nathdvara and Kankaroli became *jāgīrs* in 1809 and 1838 respectively. Given that there is no record that either house had anything to do with the 1818 treaty negotiations, it was not clear if they were bound by the same oath of loyalty to the *darbār* as were other *jāgīrdārs* because of their elevated status as the religious preceptors. This was not such a problem when it came to the Kankaroli *mahārājas*, whose longstanding loyalty to the *darbār* culminated in their willing decision to sign the 1878 treaty between the *jāgīrdārs* and the *darbār*. This was not the case, however, with the Nathdvara house thus making Giridhar's actions towards the *darbār* extremely problematic. Whether or not the Nathdvara *mahārāja* could exercise his authority as a spiritual leader to sidestep the authority of the *darbār* was never defined any more than whether or not it was permissible for the *darbār* to punish a *mahārāja* for actions that violated treaty obligations. This ill defined aspect of the relationship between the *darbār* and Nathdvara would cause both sides to come into serious conflict during the nineteenth century. The nature of this conflict is to be taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

The Darbār, the British, and the Runaway Mahārāja: The Transformation of the Nathdvara-Mewar Relationship

The *tilkāyats* of Nathdvara had done incredibly well for themselves by the beginning of the nineteenth century. As the descendants of Viṭṭhalnāth's first son, Giridhar, they enjoyed the special position within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* of caring for Śrīnāthjī, the image of Kṛṣṇa that was the principal object of devotion and adoration by all members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. In Braj, the *tilkāyats* and their families oversaw the *seva* to Śrīnāthjī in Govardhan and continued to do so once it had moved to Mewar during the reign of Rāj Singh. The Mewar *darbār* embraced their roles as the protectors of Hinduism and honored the *tilkāyats* lavishly by providing for their economic needs, protecting them during the bleak period of the Mewar civil war, and formally inducting them into the upper echelons of Mewari society by making the *tilkāyats jāgīrdārs* of the first rank.

These successes, however, were accompanied by periods of difficulty. The *tilkāyats* constantly had to face challenges to their authority from other family members within the Vallabha dynasty. They endured humiliation at the hands of the Marathas who sacked the Nathdvara temple, and narrowly escaped financial ruin during the reign of Govind and Lakṣmī. Lakṣmī's attempt to separate from Mewar in 1832 would prove to be a major turning point in the history of the relationship between the *darbār* and Nathdvara. Lakṣmī's failed attempt to establish the political autonomy of Nathdvara had somewhat soured relations between Nathdvara and the *darbār* who was annoyed by her effort to bypass the authority of the *darbār* in order to establish direct relations with colonial authorities in Ajmer.

Matters would take something of an ugly turn during the reign of Govind's successor, Giridhar, whose authoritarian personality and open disdain for the *darbār* would signal the beginning of an extremely stormy relationship between Nathdvara and the *darbār*. Giridhar's reign would culminate in a major political and legal spectacle involving the *darbār*, Nathdvara, and colonial authorities that would come to demonstrate the dynamics of the complex political relationships of nineteenth century Mewar and show how these relationships would have an adverse effect between Nathdvara and its principal patrons, the Mewar *darbār*.

6.1 The Reign of Giridhar as the *Tilkāyat* of Nathdvara

The reign of Giridhar as the *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara was a most controversial one. Giridhar was known not only for his commitment to his *seva* for Śrīnāthjī, but also for his seemingly endless need to enforce his authority as *tilkāyat* over the residents of Nathdvara.¹ Giridhar attempted to underline his exalted position as *tilkāyat* by building a private residence within the temple that was deliberately modeled on architectural styles popular among the Rājput nobility for the construction of their own residences. It was from the balcony of this newly built residence that Giridhar held court and made stern legal judgements and administrative measures such as his decision to increase the private

¹ Giridhar's reign was controversial enough that very little has been mentioned in *Puṣṭi Mārga* literature about his tenure as the *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara outside the fact that he was a dedicated devotee of Kṛṣṇa, whose patriotism caused tensions between Nathdvara and the *darbār*. The little we know comes from sectarian literature. See Prabhudās Vairagi, *Śrī Nāthdvāra Sanskr̥itik kā Itihās* (Aligarh: Bhārat Prakāśan Mandir, 1995), pp. 22-23. Also see the small details mentioned in Amit Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji* (Allahabad: Mapin Publications, 1995), pp. 69-70.

army under his control primarily with Sindhi and Afghan mercenaries. Giridhar's exercise of absolute temporal power over the residents of Nathdvara, however gave rise to rumors about his erratic behavior and notoriously short-temper. Stories began to abound about his association with and harboring of criminals, his attempts to extort tributes from the residents of Nathdvara, and his excessive cruelty to individuals who crossed him in even the smallest of matters.

There was a certain amount of truth to the rumors. Giridhar's unexplained decision to ban the wearing of brocaded clothing and the construction of balconies on private residences in Nathdvara did seem just a bit odd and his short temper did strain relations greatly with the Kankaroli house.² It was Giridhar who prevented the Kankaroli *maharaja*, Govardhanlāl, from celebrating the annual Annakut festival by stopping his entourage at the town's limits. It was also Giridhar's belligerence that in part sidetracked efforts to mend fences between the Kankaroli and the Nathdvara houses over the conflict concerning Govardhanlāl's temple manager. Yet what about the events of 1858? Was Giridhar's decision to shelter fleeing mutineers an expression of a selfless patriot willing to risk defying the orders of his royal patron? It is difficult to tell. This was, after all, the *tilkāyat* who once performed a special worship in which he draped Śrīnāthjī in the saffron clothing Rajput warriors wore when they prepared themselves for martyrdom in the battlefield.³ The openly pro-British stance of the *darbār* inflamed Giridhar's patriotic

² Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrnathji*, p. 68.

³ Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrināthjī*, p. 70.

passions, but it also seemed to him as an attack on his authority. If Giridhar wanted to shelter people he perceived as patriots, he had every right to do so, given the authority that the *darbār* had bestowed upon the Nathdvara house.

Giridhar seemed to have gotten away with his actions, for the *darbār* did nothing towards Giridhar. Svarūp Singh had died in 1861 and a Regency Council was established to help the young Śambhu Singh rule over Mewar until he came of age in 1865. From that point onwards, the ties between the British and the *darbār* became even closer as Śambhu Singh gave generous amounts of revenue to aid the British in their economic reform of Mewar. In other words, the *darbār*'s priority was on strengthening its alliance with the British and it seemed to have no particular interest in picking on Giridhar for sheltering Tātyā Tope and other fugitive rebels. Giridhar, meanwhile, was continuing to build up his power in Nathdvara. Whether it was truly through extortion as rumors alleged, or by the more regular means of pilgrimage donations, Nathdvara's coffers began to swell with revenue under Giridhar's leadership. The estate's military retainer grew to a size of fifteen hundred men and Giridhar exercised unchecked civil and judicial authority over Nathdvara and its surrounding villages

The *darbār*, however, was eventually forced to address the widespread rumors about Giridhar's alleged maniacal behavior.⁴ Shortly after he took the throne, Śambhu Singh

⁴ The account that follows is based on correspondence kept by colonial administrators in Rajasthan and consists of material that includes memos, handwritten documents, and published reports issued by AGGs and the local Mewar Political Agents. The collection is to be found in the National Archives of India in New Delhi as part of correspondence of the colonial administrators associated with the Government of India's Foreign Department.

began to pressure Giridhar to furnish the *darbār* with documents detailing all his acts of civil and judicial administration for the last six months. Giridhar refused repeatedly thus infuriating Śambhu Singh and the *darbār*'s officials. Relations between Śambhu Singh and Giridhar continued to worsen in 1872. The representative that the Nathdvara *mahārajas* had traditionally kept at the *darbār* was now dismissed and his protests to colonial authorities that Śambhu Singh flagrantly violated the terms of the land grants given to Nathdvara in 1809 were summarily dismissed. A year later, in 1873, Giridhar insisted again that a representative should be reinstated at the *darbār*, but his petition to the British Political Agent was yet again dismissed.⁵

Matters continued to worsen in 1873. For a number of years Giridhar had been terrorizing a servant by the name of Paraśurām, who had fled to Udaipur and sought the protection of the *darbār*. Consequently, in 1873, the *darbār* had sent an envoy to Nathdvara to put an end to the ongoing tensions between the master and his servant. Giridhar expressed his remorse for his actions to the envoy and stated his desire to make amends by taking back Paraśurām with the promise that he would treat the servant with kindness. Giridhar seemed genuinely sincere in his intentions and Paraśurām returned to Nathdvara under the care of the *darbār*'s envoy. It actually appeared that Giridhar was willing to keep his word. For the time that the envoy was in Nathdvara, Giridhar treated

⁵ Colonel J.A. Wright's correspondence to A.C. Lyall, Officiating Agent, Governor-General, Rajpootana dated November 2nd, 1874 in "Conduct of the Gosain of Nathdvara, Meywar Nos. 647-650" in *Government of India Foreign Department* (1875).

Paraśurām well, but the moment the envoy left for Udaipur, Giridhar threw Paraśurām back in jail and had him beaten. An infuriated *mahārāṇa* then took one of Giridhar's personal servants and jailed him in Udaipur until Giridhar made good on his word to release his long suffering servant.⁶

Giridhar yet again refused and, in the February of 1874, Śambhu Singh resumed some of the villages attached to the Nathdvara estate, in an effort to punish Giridhar, but it backfired. An enraged Giridhar began to angle for a major fight with the *mahārāṇa* and almost got his wish. The *darbār* sent an armed force to Nathdvara to quell the rebellious *tilkāyat*, but Mewar's Vaiṣṇavite population sprung into action and began to pressure Śambhu Singh to desist from using military force.⁷ The *darbār* ultimately backed down and recalled its troops. It simply did not want to risk alienating a very significant portion of its citizenry. Thus Giridhar seemed to have won yet again over the *darbār*. In 1858 he had successfully defied the *darbār*'s policies about harboring fugitives, in 1873 he flaunted the *darbār*'s orders about the imprisonment of Paraśurām, and now, in 1874, his influence and stature in Mewari society protected him from being displaced forcibly by the *mahārāṇa*'s very own troops.

Towards the summer of 1874, however, Śambhu Singh became ill, thus throwing Mewar into a state of uncertainty. Sajjan Singh was a minor and no one in the state knew who would eventually rule over the kingdom until he came of age. It was against this

⁶Wright's correspondence to Lyall dated November 2nd, 1874.

⁷ Somani, *Later Mewar*, p. 272.

backdrop that Giridhar made a bold move and decided to declare Nathdvara as being politically independent from Mewar. Giridhar thus began to press for political autonomy with the British Political Agent, Col. J.A. Wright in Ajmer, but his approach was hardly a case study in the practice of subtle diplomacy. Giridhar attempted to bribe the recently arrived Wright to accept his claim for autonomy by offering him an expensive cloth of gold.

Giridhar maintained that it was merely the annual tribute made by Nathdvara each time a new political agent took his position in Mewar, but Wright was less than impressed with the explanation. He knew that Giridhar had repeatedly been pestering colonial authorities in the past to take his side in the dispute against the *mahārāṇa* by asking the British to force the *mahārāṇa* to rescind his order that banned Nathdvara from sending a representative to the *darbār*. The envoy that Giridhar sent to Ajmer with his tribute was thus sent back to Nathdvara with the message that if Giridhar had to say anything to colonial authorities, he should voice it through the *darbār* not directly to British officials.⁸

Giridhar was not pleased. Given his less than harmonious past history with the *darbār*, he was hardly going to entertain the notion of using the *darbār* as a mouthpiece for voicing Nathdvara's concerns. Thus when the *darbār* made one more attempt to persuade Giridhar to release Parasurām and comply over the issue of administrative and

⁸ Wright's correspondence to Lyall, dated November 2nd, 1874.

judicial accountability, Giridhar, not surprisingly, refused yet again.⁹ For some inexplicable reason, however, he went back to his first failed strategy for establishing his political autonomy. He attempted to bribe Col. Wright yet again with his offering of the gold cloth and an added bonus of one lakh rupees if the Agent would take his side against the *mahārāṇa*. Although Giridhar's generous offer was declined, he continued a letter writing campaign for his support. The British response to Giridhar's actions was polite and to the point. They simply refused to answer any of his letters.¹⁰

Shortly afterwards, in October of 1874, Śambhu Singh died. Sajjan Singh ascended to the throne of Mewar, his uncle Sohan Singh's claims to the throne were put down militarily by the British, and the affairs of state were run by the British-chaired Regency Council. The whole of Mewar went into a state of mourning over the *mahārāṇa*'s death, but in Nathdvara Giridhar did not shed one tear for the passing of Śambhu Singh. He instead prohibited the residents of Nathdvara from performing the customary mourning practices of closing shops for three days and publicly displaying grief by the shaving of their heads. According to the representative of the *darbār* who went to Nathdvara to substantiate the reports of Giridhar's actions, Giridhar allowed the shops to be closed for one day, but twenty to forty individuals in fact defied Giridhar's orders about shaving their heads to mourn the death of the *mahārāṇa*. Others wanted to follow suit, but ultimately decided to not make a public display of their grief for fear of being punished.

⁹ Wright's correspondence to Lyall, dated November 2nd, 1874.

¹⁰ Wright's correspondence to Lyall dated November 2nd, 1874

Their fears were well founded. Giridhar, in his well-known style of swift but stern justice, fined and imprisoned several of the mourners for their actions, ignoring all pleas from other residents to show mercy.¹¹ Giridhar, then, turned his sights towards the long-suffering Paraśurām. He called Paraśurām into his presence and had him flogged, reminding his former employee with each stroke of the whip that the *mahārāṇa* was no longer alive to protect him.¹²

Giridhar's conduct during the mourning period for Śambhu Singh understandably upset the *darbār*, but the British publicly continued to show their indifference to Giridhar's behavior. Privately, however, they were increasingly concerned about what they believed was the *mahārāja's* contumacious behavior. The colonial authorities nonetheless were still reluctant to accept the Council's attempt to shift the responsibility of dealing with Giridhar onto the shoulders of the British Political Agent. They continued to maintain that the matter was an internal affair between the *darbār* and Giridhar and would only provide military assistance at the request of the royal court.¹³ The British knew, however, they could not remain uninvolved. They were simply far too embedded in the administrative affairs of the *darbār* to turn a blind eye to what had now become a

¹¹ "Translation of kyfeeut from the Vakeel of Meywar to the address of the Political Agent of Meywar, dated 21st, October 1874." Also see the petitions of Eklingdass Dehpooora and Gungaram Ghotawalla to the *darbār* dated on October 17th, 1874 and October 21st, 1874 respectively. Both are added as appendices to Wright's correspondence with Lyall of December 2nd, 1874.

¹² Wright to Lyall, dated November 2nd, 1874.

¹³ Lyall's correspondence to J.A. Wright, dated November 30th, 1874, "Conduct of the Gosain of Nathdvara, Meywar, Nos. 647-650."

very long-drawn out conflict. The political competency of the *darbār* was being called into question and so was the competency of the British to maintain its authority in Mewar. Colonial authorities thus found themselves preparing to involve themselves in the conflict between the *darbār* and Giridhar.

6.2 The Ouster of Giridhar

In December of 1874, two months after the death of Śambhu Singh, the office of the Governor General for Rajputana wrote to the Political Agent in Mewar, Col. Wright, rather worried about the situation concerning Nathdvara. It was now necessary, Wright was told, for the conflict to be finally settled and that he was now officially empowered to act on behalf of the British to put an end to the dispute between Nathdvara and the *darbār*.¹⁴ A month later, in 1875, Wright's successor, Col. Herbert, wasted no time in using his position as the chairman of the Regency Council to plan his action. He drafted a letter to Giridhar asking him to recognize the temporal authority of the *darbār* and afterwards began to press the Regency Council to gather intelligence about Giridhar's military capabilities and to gauge the feelings of Nathdvara's residents towards their *mahārāja*. The reason for Herbert's request was fairly evident: he was going to give

¹⁴ Lyall's correspondence to Wright, dated December 2nd, 1874, "Conduct of the Gosain of Nathdvara, Meywar, Nos. 647-650. Later government correspondence would term the action as being a matter of political necessity. See "The Gosain of Nathdvara, Nos. 103-107" in *Government of India Foreign Department Records, Political A* (1876). The official government summary of the correspondence that is generally included at the beginning of a new file of correspondence stated in this context that the decision to take action against Giridhar was in the interests of the "good government of Meywar" and that whatever measures that were to be taken had to "be approved by the Agent to the Governor-General and would not be initiative or direct."

Giridhar one more chance to end the dispute through peaceful means before removing him by using military force.

The Regency Council was somewhat uneasy with Herbert's plan. They wanted to depose Giridhar and install his young son, Govardhanlāl, on the Nathdvara throne but they were reluctant to commit themselves to firm action hoping diplomacy would somehow convince Giridhar to leave. Herbert's plan, however, did seem to be a better alternative to some of the nobles on the Council. The measures proposed by Wright were the very ones the British took in 1875 to stomp out the rebellious Sohan Singh who was using military force to oppose his young nephew's accession to the throne of Mewar.

Herbert thus used his advisory position on the Council to pressure the nobles into rubber stamping his proposal, after which a letter drafted by Herbert in the name of the Regency Council was sent to Giridhar asking him to acquiesce to the *darbār*. Giridhar's response, however, in Herbert's eyes, was evasive and unresponsive. Herbert gave the *mahārāja* one more chance to give up before a military force would be sent to take him out once and for all.¹⁵ This time Giridhar seemed to have got the hint. He sent a letter dated December 31, 1875 to Herbert stating that he would agree to the terms set by the *darbār*. He would acknowledge the supremacy of the *darbār*, dismiss all the foreign mercenaries in his service, release all prisoners in his jails including Parāsūrām, furnish all his judicial case files to the *darbār*, and answer any other requests made by the

¹⁵ See Herbert's correspondence to Lyall dated to January 4th, 1876 in "Attitude Assumed by the Gosain of Nathdvara Shrine Towards the Meywar Darbar, Nos. 54-84" in *Government of India Foreign Department Records* (1876).

darbār.¹⁶

Herbert wrote back to Giridhar congratulating him on the wisdom of decision. He assured Giridhar that the *darbār* would honor the 1809 order that allowed Giridhar to exercise his civil and judicial powers over Nathdvara as long as he did so prudently.

Nathdvara's representative to the *mahārāṇa* could come back to the royal court and the *darbār* would restore to Giridhar the villages it had taken away from Nathdvara.¹⁷

Privately, however, Herbert gloated about his success. In his report to the Governor-General about Giridhar's surrender, he wrote in a self-congratulatory tone about how his adoption of the strong-arm tactics taken with Sohan Singh had effectively scared Giridhar into capitulating to British authority. Herbert felt very proud of himself.¹⁸ In his eyes, he single-handedly succeeded in resolving a problem in a few weeks, which the *darbār* had not solved for years.

The victory was short-lived. In the six months after his agreement with Herbert, Giridhar did absolutely nothing to fulfill the promises he made to the Political Agent and the *darbār*. The Regency Council and British authorities were considerably upset. They

¹⁶ The translation of Giridhar's letter is to be found in "Attitude Assumed by the Gosain of Nathdvra Shrine Towards the Mewar Darbar, Nos. 54-84"

¹⁷ Herbert's letter is dated to Jan. 4th, 1876 in "Attitude Assumed by the Gosain of Nathdvara Shrine Towards the Meywar Darbar, Nos. 54-84."

¹⁸ Herbert wrote "There can be no doubt that the measures adopted against Sohan Singh of Bagor and their successful termination have had a great effect on the mind of the Gosain in inducing him to tender his submission. I venture to hope that my conduct of these two cases will meet with your approval and of the government of India." See Hebert's comments in "Attitude Assumed by the Gosain of Nathdvāra Shrine Towards the Meywar Darbar, Nos. 54-84."

had thought the Nathdvara matter was completely resolved and thus Giridhar's flagrant violation of his agreement with the *darbār* proved to be far too much to take for both the *darbār* and colonial authorities.. Herbert's successor as Political Agent, Major Gunning, took over the chairmanship of the Council and began to encourage the Council to increase its pressure upon Giridhar. The Council issued a letter on May 5th, 1876, notifying Giridhar that he could either be escorted by a *darbār* official to Udaipur honorably or he could be arrested, but either way he was going to come to the *darbār* to explain his actions. The letter, however, was somewhat misleading. The Council's letter left one with the impression that the *darbār* would send a few officials to bring Giridhar to Udaipur, but that was far from it. After much effort, Gunning finally induced the Council to agree to send a military force consisting of *darbār* and British troops which would surround the Nathdvara temple and force Giridhar to surrender. If Giridhar came out peacefully, he would be honorably treated and escorted to Udaipur. If, on the other hand, he resisted, Giridhar would be captured and blamed for any possible loss of life.¹⁹

Two days passed and there was no response from Giridhar. An envoy was sent on May 7th to Nathdvara warning the temple manager that a military force was arriving in Nathdvara to escort Giridhar to Udaipur and that he should take measures to ensure that the Śrīnāthjī image would be safe and secure should any type of armed conflict arise in the vicinity of the temple. Meanwhile a contingent of British and Mewari troops were

¹⁹ The letters issued in the Regency Council to Giridhar and Baldeo Das, the temple manager can be found in the "Gosain of Nathdvara, Nos. 103-107."

prepared to leave for Nathdvara and reached there on May 8th, 1876 under the watchful eye of Major Gunning. The troops then attacked Giridhar's residence prompting him to leave the temple precincts in a palanquin with his fifteen-year-old son, Govardhanlāl.

This proved to be a problem for the *darbār*'s forces that were outside the temple. The plan was to oust Giridhar and replace him with his son, but matters now became most complicated when Giridhar took his son hostage. Giridhar actually threatened to kill Govardhanlāl in front of the *darbār*'s troops declaring that his son's death would be better than having to endure the disgrace of watching the boy being installed on the throne of Nathdvara while he, the father, was still alive.²⁰ The forces, convinced Giridhar would carry out his request given his past behavior with the *darbār*, quickly surrounded the palanquin and snatched the boy away from Giridhar. With Govardhanlāl's release, both father and son were now under the complete control of the *darbār*'s forces and were escorted back to Udaipur. Giridhar's reign over Nathdvara was now over with no loss of life or damage to the temple. British officials, in the correspondence written in the aftermath of the mission, let out a heavy sigh of relief that the dispute was over and patted themselves on the back for helping to engineer the ouster of the Nathdvara *tilkāyat* through a bloodless coup.²¹

²⁰ For the description of Giridhar's capture, see the correspondence between Gunning and Lyall dated May 12th, 1876 "The Gosain of Nathdvara, Nos. 103-107."

²¹ The correspondence from government officials in Rajasthan to authorities in Calcutta went as follows:
 "The policy of Bismarck has succeeded at any rate in Rajpootana !

6.2.1 The Exile of Giridhar

The Council in the meantime acted quickly. The young Govardhanlāl was brought to the *darbār* and was made to sign a document stating he would acknowledge the suzerainty of the *mahārāṇa* and would make regular visits to pay the *mahārāṇa* his respects. The administrative and judicial authority given to the *tilkāyat* were revoked and Govardhanlāl was then escorted back to Nathdvara where he was now formally installed as the new *tilkāyat*. There was, however, a problem. Govardhanlāl was still a minor and had no next of kin to help him run Nathdvara. His mother by this time was long dead and thus the *darbār* appointed a manager to supervise the temple's affairs and revenues. Furthermore, Govardhanlāl would be provided a tutor from the *darbār* to act as his guardian, while the civil and judicial administration of Nathdvara and its estates would be supervised directly by the *darbār*. The matters relating directly towards the performance of *seva* to Śrīnāthjī and any other religious duties, however, would be completely supervised by the young Govardhanlāl because of his position as the spiritual leader of an eminent Vaiṣṇavite community

The Meywar Darbar, with the support and advice of Major Gunning, the Officiating Political Agent and President of the Council has successfully asserted its authority over its reculant spiritual vassal, the Gosain of Nathdvara.

The Gosain has been deposed and removed and his son appointed in his stead after formally acknowledging the territorial sovereignty of the Durbar.

The result has been attained without bloodshed, or other *contretemps*; and the proceedings appear to have been characterized throughout by firmness, judgment, and moderation. Satisfaction might be expressed at the result, and Major Gunning's proceedings approved."

This is found at the end of the summary of the correspondence in "The Gosain of Nathdvara, Nos. 103-107."

Thus the *darbār* had now dealt with Govardhanlāl, but it still had to decide what to do with Giridhar. Giridhar was still in Udaipur but living under house arrest in a home that he owned in the city. He was now totally at the mercy of the *darbār* he had defied so many times in the past. Given the bitter history that Giridhar had with the *darbār*, one would have expected a rather harsh punishment against the ousted *māhārāja*. The ultimate decision of the *darbār*, however, was far from being harsh. Giridhar was to be exiled to Braj with the order that he never cause trouble for the *darbār* again and never enter Mewar. In order to make life in exile more bearable, the *darbār* would provide Giridhar with a monthly allowance to meet his living expenses in Braj. Giridhar was then finally permitted to leave Udaipur for Gokul, where Vallabha had first founded the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. On May 21st, 1876, the *darbār* gave Giridhar two thousand rupees for his travelling expenses, fourteen loading camels, five tents, ten servants, and a small convoy of forty armed guards to escort him all the way to Braj.²² British officials were rather shocked at the royal treatment Giridhar was receiving for his deportation. Even two years after Giridhar's exile, they still could not understand why the *darbār* would be so generous to a person whose behavior smacked of nothing but insolence. If Giridhar had committed such actions on British controlled territory, he would have been served immediately with an arrest warrant under colonial law.²³

²² See Gunning's correspondence with Lyall dated May 20th, 1876 "The Gosain of Nathdvara, Nos.103-107."

²³ This was expressed by Gunning's successor, E.C Impey two years later in correspondence written to Lyall dated March 7th, 1878. See "Affairs of the Nathdvara Shrine in Meywar, Nos. 196-214" in *Government of India Foreign Department Records, Political-A* (1878).

The reaction of colonial authorities was somewhat understandable. There was never any reason given by the *darbār* for the great restraint it had shown towards Giridhar in light of its long acrimonious relationship with the former *tilkāyat*. Colonial authorities, however, should have known that the *darbār*'s final decision was in all probability a manifestation of the conflicted feelings that nobles had towards Giridhar. During the beginning stages of the plans that would bring about Giridhar's ouster, Col. Gunning had noted that even though the Regency Council was fed up with Giridhar's acts of political insubordination, he was afraid the plan would go awry if he asked a noble from the court to lead the expedition. Gunning explained that the majority of the members on the Regency Council were vacillating in taking definitive action against Giridhar because they still accorded him much respect as the *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara. The vast majority of the nobles were initiated into the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by Giridhar himself and dutifully wore the rosary (*kanṭhi*) given to them by their *guru* at the time of their initiation. The nobles simply could not bring themselves to take military action against their own *guru*.²⁴

British authorities knew these feelings within the *darbār* for quite a long time. The *darbār*, throughout its years of conflict with Giridhar, had always maintained to colonial officials that the Mewar *darbār* had accepted the spiritual authority of the Nathdvara *mahārājas* for centuries and would always honor it. Their actions against Giridhar were not directed at the spiritual head of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, but were, rather, directed at the

²⁴ See Gunning's comments in his correspondence to Lyall dated May 12th, 1876 in the Government of Government of India, "The Gosain of Nathdwara, Nos. 103-107," in *Government of India Foreign Department Records, Political A* (1876).

temporal ruler of the *jāgīrdār* of Nathdvara. Consequently, matters of politics dictated that the *mahārāja*, like all *jāgīrdārs*, had to be brought into line in order to preserve the political stability of the state.²⁵ The terms surrounding the deportation thus seemed to reflect the *darbār*'s dual and conflicting perceptions of the authority that was to be accorded to the Nathdvara *tilkāyat*. Giridhar was punished for his political insubordination with his permanent exile from Mewar, but the financial aid extended to Giridhar and his royal sendoff to Braj seemed to reflect the belief of the *darbār* that it had to continue its centuries-long religious commitment to the honor the spiritual authority of the Nathdvara *tilkāyats*.

Once Giridhar arrived in Braj, it seemed that he was beginning to adjust to his life outside Mewar. He moved to Mathura and then from there to Gokul where he was to settle according to the terms of his exile, yet he could not forget about what had happened with the *darbār*. He had failed in his bid for independence, he was thrown out of Mewar, and suffered the humiliation of being replaced by his fifteen-year-old son, whose reign as *tilkāyat* was now being controlled by the Mewar court. Giridhar waited just over a year and then decided yet again to launch a campaign against the *mahārāṇa*. In 1877, Giridhar began touring India with the purpose of encouraging *Puṣṭi Mārga* Vaiṣṇavas to support his bid to regain the Nathdvara throne. Giridhar traveled to major *Puṣṭi Mārga* shrines pressing his case and was rather successful. The *mahārāṇa* of Kota was persuaded to

²⁵ See Wright's comments to Lyall dated to October 14th, 1875 in *The Government of India Foreign Department Record* (1875).

withhold his annual donation of sixty thousand rupees to the Nathdvara shrine and the British were flooded with petitions from *Puṣṭi Mārga* Vaiṣṇavas.²⁶

For colonial authorities, these petitions were the latest in a round of petitions they had been receiving from *Puṣṭi Mārga* Vaiṣṇavas since 1876 when the *darbār* had resumed some of Nathdvara's villages. The 1876 petitions argued that the granting of civil and judicial administrative rights by Bhīm Singh in 1809 actually meant that Nathdvara was given the right to proclaim itself a sovereign state. Consequently, the *darbār*'s actions were a violation of Giridhar's rights to rule as an independent sovereign. The petitions issued through 1877 and 1878 were much the same in nature. They argued that Giridhar's ouster was illegal and an affront to a respected religious leader who was invested with a "spiritual office of divine origin."²⁷

The British were unmoved by the petitions. The British officials in Mewar who reviewed the 1877 and 1878 petitions maintained that the ouster was thoroughly legal and that reinstating Giridhar would only serve to strain the steadily improving relations between Sajjan Singh and Govardhanlāl. Moreover, the Political Agent for Mewar, Col. Impey, maintained that the petitions were not even representative of the entire *Puṣṭi Mārga* community. The whole affair concerning Giridhar, Impey stated, divided the *Puṣṭi Mārga* quite deeply and the community had now fragmented into three divisions:

²⁶ See Impey's correspondence with Lyall dated March 7th, 1878 in "Affairs of the Nathdvara Shrine in Meywar, Nos. 196-214."

one who claimed that Giridhar was infallible, another group who would now accord their reverence only to *Puṣṭi Mārga* images, and apparently a growing third faction that seemed to be disaffected entirely with the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and were saving their reverence for what Impey called the “unseen deity.” What Impey meant by this was not clear, but one can only presume that it was a reference to the supreme formless *brahman* of Śāṅkara’s *Advaita Vedānta* philosophical system. The British thus dismissed the petitions on the grounds that Giridhar’s return would cause further instability to Mewar and that those who supported Giridhar’s claims were a group of what Impey termed “bigoted adherents” within a fragmented *Puṣṭi Mārga*.²⁸

6.3 Giridhar in Bombay

The so-called “bigoted adherents” who made up Giridhar’s supporters may indeed have been, as Impey claimed, one small group of devotees within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, but they were a vocal and influential group who resided primarily in India’s central commercial center of Bombay. Bombay was populated by a very high concentration of extremely wealthy Hindu and Jain mercantile communities from Gujarat who owned some of the most important banking firms in India. Almost all the members of the Hindu mercantile families in Bombay were confirmed devotees of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and regularly visited

²⁷ The 1876 petitions can be found in the “Attitude Assumed by the Gosain of the Nathdvara Shrine Towards the Meywar Darbar,” in *Government of India Foreign Department Records Political-B* (1876). The 1877 and 1878 petitions can be found in “Affairs of the Nathdvara Shrine in Meywar, Nos. 196-214.”

²⁸ For details of this split, see Impey’s March 7th correspondence to Lyall in *Government of India*, “Affairs of the Nathdvara Shrine in Meywar, Nos. 196-214,” in *Government of India Foreign Department Records, Political-A* (1878).

and financially supported the city's local *Puṣṭi Mārga* shrine. They were also known for being actively involved in the affairs associated with the Nathdvara temple. Vaiṣṇava merchants from Bombay regularly donated money to Nathdvara and it was the prominent banking firm of Navanita Purushotamdas that managed the temple's properties in Bombay as well as all the donations made in Bombay to the Nathdvara shrine.

It was this banking firm that, in 1878, extended an invitation to Giridhar on behalf of Bombay's *Puṣṭi Mārga* community to reside permanently in the city. Giridhar accepted the offer, arrived in Bombay in 1878, and was pleasantly surprised by an offering made to him by his new patron. The firms' managers all supported Giridhar's claims to be the only rightful head of the Nathdvara temple and consequently, they offered the *ex-tilkāyat* complete control over the administration of Nathdvara's account books. Giridhar naturally accepted. He made his residence in the property owned by the Nathdvara temple and began to intercept and keep all the offerings that were being made to Nathdvara through the firm. It seemed the natural thing to do. Giridhar still considered himself the only rightful *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara and the offerings made to the shrine should be in his custody.

Giridhar's actions in Bombay were proving to be a major problem for Govardhanlāl and Sajjan Singh, who having assumed full control of the Mewar throne, were now beginning to work together to improve the temple's administration and finances. The reason for the co-operative effort was damage control. Sajjan Singh was very aware that he had alienated a good section of the Vaishnava community with the

expulsion of Giridhar and for Govardhanlāl that meant a loss of temple revenue due to the decline in pilgrimage traffic. Giridhar's alienation of the temple's revenue and seizure of property was now the last thing that Sajjan Singh and Govardhanlāl needed. It was reported that Giridhar now had in his possession property belonging to the temple in the amount of a hundred thousand rupees.

The difficulty, however, was the vulnerability of Govardhanlāl. He was barely seventeen and was not in a position of strength to stop his father on his own. Sajjan Singh thus came to his aid. The *mahārāṇa* made it very clear to British authorities that under no circumstances would he allow Giridhar back into Mewar and then hired a group of lawyers to file a law suit against Giridhar in the Bombay High Court. The suit was filed in the name of Govardhanlāl who claimed the property taken by his father belonged to him and the Nathdvara temple. Court proceedings ensued between December 1878 and February 1879 in Bombay and revolved around the terms of Giridhar's expulsion. The court had to determine whether Giridhar's forfeiture of his control over the Nathdvara estates applied to the property the temple held in Bombay.²⁹

Making this determination meant that the whole case would revolve around the thorny issue of judicial jurisdiction. Under the paramountcy treaty of 1818, Udaipur was under the judicial control of the *mahārāṇa* and could not be considered to be a British

²⁹ See the copy of the civil suit filed in the Bombay High Court for the details of Giridhar's actions in Bombay and what were the issues to be decided by the judges hearing the case in Government of India, "The Nathdwara Shrine in Meywar, Nos. 47-48," in *Government of India Foreign Department Records* (1879). The details would again be summarized in correspondence about the Giridhar affair written in 1882. See Government of India, "Case of the Gosain of Nathdwara, Nos. 217-228," in *Government of India Foreign Department Records - Political A* (1882).

territory like Bombay, which was subject to the colonial law enforced by the High Court. The plaintiff was to argue that the expulsion was carried out under the direct sanction of the British Government of India, consequently making it an Act of State that would make the terms of the expulsion subject to colonial law and hence applicable to Bombay. The defence also sought to prove that the expulsion was done directly under the sanction of the British Government, but was consequently an illegal act of a foreign power that nullified the whole terms of the expulsion. Either way the involvement of the British Government and its agents in Mewar would be questioned.

This would become problematic for colonial authorities in Calcutta that were monitoring the case. Herbert had planned and personally executed the first attempt at coercing Giridhar; Gunning had not merely advised, but repeatedly pressured the nobles to use military force to solve the dispute, and the final military expedition against Giridhar had been carried out under Gunning's watchful eye. The British Political Agents involved in the case were hardly neutral and were pressuring the Regency Council into making decisions that were in agreement with the Government's orders to its political agents to end the affair and bring back order to Mewar. Such actions violated the spirit of the 1818 treaty and could have serious legal implications. Deposing a leader in a colony required a special act of Parliament to be passed in London, but the first attempt to depose Giridhar was personally carried out by Herbert without parliamentary consent. Herbert's actions were thus illegal under the British legal system.

The Government of India in Calcutta did eventually apprise officials in London of what had occurred in Mewar, but only after the fact. Herbert's actions were never

mentioned by the officials in India, who, instead, focussed only on the events that led to the expedition that finally ousted Giridhar. Officials in India repeatedly maintained that they had no direct role in the ouster of Giridhar and that the Political Agent's involvement in the affair could not be construed as the direct intervention of the Government of India in the internal affairs of Udaipur. The Political Agent acted purely as an advising member of the Council and in no way represented any interest in or commitment to the affair on the part of colonial authorities. The Regency Council made all final decisions concerning the expulsion, freely, in the name of the *darbār* of Udaipur.³⁰

When the *darbār* came to British officials to take its side by making the Government of India party to their suit against Giridhar, the British reiterated the explanation they had made to London. Privately, however, officials in Calcutta were worrying that supporting the *darbār* in the law suit would mean giving up their authority to the legal scrutiny of the High Court and possibly being compelled to explain the actions of their representatives in the independent territory of Mewar. In other words, British officials in India would have to justify in court how their role as paramount power went from being a silent, neutral observer in the affair to an active participant whose actions may have possibly violated British law.³¹ Officials in Calcutta thus told the *darbār* that they were going to refuse its request because they had no direct interest in the suit. The suit was solely between Giridhar and the *darbār* over property and income that was alienated from the temple.

³⁰ See the letter dated August 7th, 1876 written by Government officials in Calcutta to the Secretary of State for India in "The Gosain of Nathdvara, Nos. 103-107."

³¹ This was the concern that was revealed by colonial authorities in the abstract of the correspondence written in 1882 for "Case of the Gosain of Nathdvara, Nos. 217-228."

The Government of India instead offered to defray the legal costs incurred by the *darbār* for the entire legal proceedings.³²

The *darbār* was thus on shaky ground when it came time to present its case. It had expected that the British would come to their aid and support its argument that Giridhar's deposition was done with the sanction of the Government of India and was consequently a political Act of State taken against a recusant *jāgīrdār*. This would mean that the High Court could enforce colonial law in Udaipur because of the British involvement in the expulsion. In making this argument, the plaintiff's counsel provided a certificate from the Political Agent testifying to the fact that Giridhar was removed from the throne of Nathdvara in the May of 1876. Govardhanlāl's counsel thus argued the certificate was proof that Giridhar's removal in Udaipur was a legitimate act sanctioned in the name of the Government of India making it fall under the purview of colonial law. It thus followed that Giridhar's actions in Bombay were illegal for it meant, that under the agreement with the *darbār*, Giridhar had to give up all claims to the property and offerings in Bombay because they now belonged to Govardhanlāl as the head of the Nathdvara temple.³³

³² See the correspondence from the Government solicitor, Risley V. Hearn, to C. Gonne, the Secretary to the Government of Bombay dated January 14th, 1879 in "The Nathdvara Shrine in Meywar, Nos. 47-48."

³³ See the court transcript for Suit no. 218 of 1878 from the High Court of Judicature at Bombay in, "Nathdvara Shrine in Meywar, Nos. 47-48."

Giridhar's lawyers, on the other hand, put up an impressive defense. They outlined how the Śrīnāthjī image, along with the other seven images distributed by Viṭṭhalnāth to his son were subject to the rule of primogeniture within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, and they produced affidavits from the Bombay *mahārājas* of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to attest to the fact that Giridhar was a lineal descendant of Vallabha who had legitimate custody of the Śrīnāthjī image. Thus, in accordance with the rules of succession within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, Giridhar was the rightful head of the Nathdvara house and should remain so until his death.

The deposition of Giridhar by the *darbār*, the defendant's counsel claimed, was thus illegitimate. It violated long-standing customs within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* about leadership succession within the community and it was also a violation of the 1809 royal edict that categorically stated that the *māhārāṇa* would not interfere in the civil and administrative decisions exercised by the Nathdvara *tilkāyats* over their lands. Furthermore, the defense counsel contended, that the expulsion of Giridhar was done by the direct political order of the British Political Agent at the behest of the *darbār* and constituted an illegal act of a foreign power that infringed on the internal religious affairs of the Nathdvara temple. Giridhar, the defense declared, was being punished in every conceivable manner for merely exercising the powers legally guaranteed to him by the *mahārāṇa*.

Therefore Giridhar's actions in Bombay, the defense continued was hardly irregular. He had been invited to Bombay at the behest of the banking firm of Navanita Purushotamdas, he took residence in property over which he had rightful custody, and he

oversaw the donations to the Nathdvara temple at the invitation of the firm. Suing Giridhar in court made no sense at all given that he again was merely collecting what was rightly his as the *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara. There were, therefore, no grounds upon which to sue Giridhar. Giridhar's expulsion itself was illegal because his legal rights were violated by the paramount power and the *darbār* had no legal authority in Bombay. Udaipur was under the legal jurisdiction of the *mahārāṇa* while Bombay was British territory and subject to the rules colonial law. The terms of Giridhar's agreement with the *darbār* to forfeit temple property only applied to property within and not outside the territory of Mewar.³⁴

The judges were more impressed with the defendant's argument than with the argument put forth by the plaintiff. The judges ruled that, in the case of the *darbār*, the certificate of the Political Agent held no value because all it indicated was that the Political Agent certified that Giridhar had been removed from Nathdvara. In no way did the certificate prove that the decision to oust Giridhar was officially sanctioned by the Government of India. The expulsion was, therefore, not an Act of State that made it subject to legal scrutiny of the High Court. The judges went on to state that even if the expulsion was an Act of State, the court would still not accept the reasons for Giridhar's expulsion. The judges, however, did not state that their reason for their conclusion was based on Giridhar's claim that his ouster was illegal because it was an act of foreign power. Giridhar no more than the *darbār* was able to prove the direct involvement of the British in the affair, but they did accept Giridhar's claim that the ouster was illegal

³⁴ See, "Nathdvara Shrine in Meywar, Nos. 47-48."

because it infringed on Bhīm Singh's edict of 1809. The judges stated that the terms of the 1809 edict were plain and clear about the temporal powers that could be exercised by Giridhar which could not be taken away simply because the *darbār* decided one day that they did not like Giridhar's use of his rightful powers

The judges thus stated that Giridhar successfully proved that he was entitled to the throne of Nathdvara, but that the High Court had no actual legal authority to undo a decision made by the *darbār*. The state of Mewar may have been under British protection, but nonetheless, it was legally given the sovereignty to conduct its own internal affairs without being subject to colonial law. The difference in legal jurisdictions between Bombay and Mewar meant that the High Court could not legally reinstate Giridhar on the throne of Nathdvara, but it did mean they could rule that the terms of the expulsion only applied to the territories of Mewar and not the British territory of Bombay. The High Court of Bombay recognized Giridhar's claim to be the rightful *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara and consequently, he did not have to forfeit the income and property that he had alienated from the Nathdvara temple.³⁵ The *darbār* was understandably not happy with the decision. It appealed the court's ruling, in the August of 1879, but was ultimately turned

³⁵ See the publication of the judgement from the Times of India dated June 20th, 1879 which was included in Government of India, "Judgement of Bombay High Court in the Nathdwara Case, Nos. 168-172," in *Government of India Foreign Department Records* (1879).

down.³⁶ It would seem that Giridhar had managed to get the better of the *darbār* yet again this time by using the protection afforded to him by the colonial legal system.

6.3.1 The Aftermath of the Court Trial

One would have thought that the appeal would have put an end to the whole affair once and for all, but Giridhar still could not let matters go. He refused to accept that he was not reinstated as the *mahārāja* of Nathdvara and two years after the appellate court made its final decision, he began to petition the British authorities once again asking them to restore his authority over Nathdvara and its estates. The petition, sent in the September of 1881, stated absolutely nothing new. Giridhar reiterated his position adding that the expulsion was a direct act of interference in the affairs of Nathdvara, and that the expulsion be reversed so Giridhar could come back to Nathdvara and retain his ancestral right over the custody of the Śrīnāthjī image and all the wealth that came with it. The image and the accompanying wealth, Giridhar maintained, were his private hereditary property. If he could not return to Nathdvara, he would then request the aid of the British in moving what he claimed was his private property from the Nathdvara temple to another location of his choice. Two months after the petition was submitted to the British, Giridhar told authorities to where he would like to move all his ancestral property. He

³⁶ See the publication of the appeal in the Government of India "Judgement of Bombay High Court in the Nathdvara Case, Nos. 168-172."

wanted to take everything into British territory where he could be protected by British law and be safely out of the *darbār*'s reach.³⁷

Giridhar just kept issuing petition after petition, between 1882 and 1889, to the Foreign Department in Delhi and to the Viceroy of India reiterating that the Śrīnāthjī image and that all the wealth attached to the Nathdvara temple were his personal property. Afterwards, in May of 1889, Giridhar turned away from petitions and went back to the Bombay High Court with the purpose of recovering the three lakh rupees that he claimed was the total value of his property in Nathdvara. The time for the filing of the suit was not chosen randomly. Giridhar's son, Govardhanlāl, had begun a tour of Western India in February of 1889 and had arrived in Bombay on April 2nd where he was greeted by Vaiṣṇavas, who honored him with gifts as the *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara. Four days later he was served with a legal notice from his father that accused his son of illegally wearing symbols and insignia associated with the position of *tilkāyat*. A month later, on May 4th, Govardhanlāl was slapped with Giridhar's lawsuit and hauled off to jail that evening. The fact that the arrest took place precisely on the day that the Bombay High Court had closed down for its summer recess seemed hardly coincidental. The arrest was timed to ensure that Govardhanlāl would not only endure the humiliation of being jailed by his

³⁷ The entire memorial issued by Giridhar with his subsequent request for the removal of Śrīnāthjī can be found in the abstract of correspondence in "Case of the Gosain of Nathdvara, Nos. 217-228" in the *Government of India Foreign Department Records* (1882).

own father, but would also have to face the further indignity of being confined to his cell until the Court came back into session.³⁸

Govardhanlāl was eventually released after five hours. A group of his supporters within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* community put up the bail in the amount of thirty-one lakh rupees and persuaded the Chief Justice to hold court in his very own bungalow on May 6th. Giridhar's lawyers naturally argued quite forcefully that Govardhanlāl should remain in jail until the court formally resumed sitting, but the Justice did not seem in a mood to listen. He declared the matter to be beyond the jurisdiction of colonial law and released a much upset Govardhanlāl. The same day Govardhanlāl then sent a telegram to colonial authorities protesting his treatment at the hands of his father claiming it was nothing more than a personal vendetta against him that he carried out through the manipulation of the colonial legal system.³⁹

British officials by now were frustrated with the whole affair. They repeatedly rejected Giridhar's petitions for years on the grounds that the expulsion was legally ordered by the *darbār* and that Giridhar would receive no assistance from the Government of India whatsoever in his quest to regain Nathdvara. In 1889, the British now had to hear about Giridhar's attempt to jail his son through the manipulation of the

³⁸ For details of the incident, see the correspondence between the Mewar political agent, S.B. Miles to the First Assistant Agent to the Governor-General in Rajputana dated June 6th, 1889. Also see the letter sent from the *darbar* to Miles bearing the date of May 18th, 1889. Both can be found in "Complaints against the Meywar Darbar Addressed to the Secretary of State by the Gosain of Nathdwara" in *Government of India Foreign Department Records* (1889).

³⁹ See "Complaints against the Meywar Darbar"

colonial legal system and then endure another five years of Giridhar's incessant lobbying for colonial support for his cause. All of these actions were then followed in 1894 with Giridhar's attempt to fully disown his son by making a failed attempt to adopt a child from another *Puṣṭi Mārga* house to serve as his successor.⁴⁰ This attempt now definitely put pressure upon colonial authorities to find some sort of resolution to their problems with Giridhar.

That pressure became all the more intolerable by letters written by the *darbār* and Govardhanlāl. The *darbār* sent a letter to colonial authorities in 1894 stating that Giridhar was not welcome in Mewar and that the Śrīnāthjī image and the wealth used for its worship could not be termed as Giridhar's private property under any circumstances. Giridhar, like all the *tilkāyats* of Nathdvara, was to be regarded as the hereditary custodian of the Śrīnāthjī image and the wealth that came with it. The only donations that a *tilkāyat* could keep were those that were made specifically in his name which he could then use as he pleased. Giridhar, however, was flagrantly violating this long-established tradition. He was illegitimately collecting donations meant for the temple and was even beginning to sell the temple's property in Bombay though the deeds were not even in his name. Giridhar's actions, the Udaipur *darbār* argued, needed to be checked before the temple went into financial ruin. Govardhanlāl echoed this very same sentiment in an 1894

⁴⁰ See the correspondence between the Political Agent, G.H. Trevor and the Secretary to Government of India, Foreign Department dated to July 23, 1894 in *Government of India Foreign Department Records, Nos. 139-148* (1894).

petition he submitted to the Viceroy pleading with him for assistance in controlling his father.⁴¹

British officials in Calcutta and Rajasthan were not exactly sure what to do. They had repeatedly suggested to Giridhar for years that he make an effort to compromise so matters would come to an end, but it was clear to them that he would never agree to such a solution. The authorities, of course, were not about to let Giridhar walk off with the Śrīnāthjī image and plant it in British territory. An action like that would make for a very tense relationship between colonial authorities and the Mewar *darbār* which, since the late seventeenth century, had sheltered the image and had been its greatest patron. The *darbār* would never allow the Śrīnāthjī image to be removed for it would mean a severe loss of prestige for Mewar's ruling dynasty. The British were thus left with either taking Giridhar themselves to Mewar and leaving him at the mercy of the *darbār* or to put him under surveillance in Bombay or in Gokul.⁴²

Giridhar himself made the decision for colonial officials.. Giridhar for unknown reasons finally admitted defeat in his battle with the *darbār* and his son, and moved back to Braj. He resided in the town of Jātipura near the original home of the Śrīnāthjī image and built himself a new royal residence similar to the palatial residence that he had built within the confines of the Nathdvara temple. One can only speculate that, by building a

⁴¹ See the *Government of India Foreign Department Records*, Nos. 139-148. The petition is dated to May 14th, 1894 while the letter is dated to the May 24th, 1894.

⁴² See the correspondence from the Mewar Political Agent, Lt. Colonel W.H.C. Wylie, to the First Assistant to the Agent to the Governor-General, Rajputana, dated to July 18th, 1894 in the *Foreign Department Records*, Nos. 139-148.

replica of his old residence in Nathdvara, Giridhar was making a final attempt to assert the authority and prestige to which he believed he was entitled, but whatever the reason for the construction of his residence in Jātipura, Giridhar lived there until his death in 1902.

It was now finally over. The drama involving Giridhar, Govardhanlāl, the Mewar *darbār*, and the Government of India finally came to an end. But what about the property and wealth in Bombay that brought the *darbār* and Govardhanlāl into conflict with Giridhar after his expulsion? One year after his father's death, in 1903, Govardhanlāl attempted one more time in the Bombay High Court to retrieve everything that Giridhar had alienated from the Nathdvara temple. This time Govardhanlāl won a very easy victory. His main opposition –the father who tried to kill, jail, and disown him- was now no longer alive .

6.4 Conclusion

The conflict between the *darbār* and the Nathdvara house would come to alter fundamentally the nature of the relationship they had established since the late seventeenth century. There was always much goodwill and respect between the Nathdvara house and Mewar *darbār* right from the time of Rāj Singh's reign, but it was clear that relationship between the two sides was not one based on full equality. Nathdvara remained fully dependant on the *darbār* for its existence and could not pose any real challenge to the authority of the *mahārājas* without causing serious damage to the financial and military support it received for centuries from the Mewar royal house. The

elevation of the Nathdvara *mahārājas* to the level of the high-ranking Mewari noblemen completely changed that relationship. The *mahārājas* could act independently of the *darbār* without any fear of punishment for the *mahārājas* had no effective control over the administration of a *jāgīrdār*'s estates. This is precisely what occurred in the Giridhar affair. Giridhar's behavior with the *darbār* seemed less indicative of a spiritual authority and more of an ambitious *jāgīrdār* looking to expand his base of power against his long-standing patron and protector. Giridhar knew he commanded an enormous amount of influence among nobles both within and outside Mewar and, more importantly, he knew that the *darbār* would be unable to control his actions within Nathdvara since it had no authority to interfere in the internal affairs of a *jāgīr*.

Giridhar was right. The *darbār* did take punitive actions against Giridhar by removing his representative from court and resuming some of his villages, but it seemed still very reluctant to use any sort of real coercive force against him because of the respect he was to be accorded as the spiritual head of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. It was the colonial authorities who ultimately brought an end to the matter by quietly engineering Giridhar's ouster by using its Political Agents to pressure an indecisive Regency Council into rubber stamping a decision to depose Giridhar by military coercion. The final result was the *darbār* adopting a policy towards Nathdvara that was strikingly similar to the manner in which colonial authorities treated the Princely States. Govardhanlāl was placed under the authority of a *darbār* appointed tutor until he came of age, his temporal powers were revoked, and he was forced to submit to the authority of the *mahārāṇa*, whose officials

now completely controlled the administrative structure of Nathdvara until they deemed Govardhanlāl capable of ruling by himself. All that remained for Govardhanlāl was his powers to make decisions in spiritual matters; otherwise, all he could do was accept the instructions of the *darbār* when it came to the administration of the temple's assets. The *darbār* was no longer the protector and patron of the Nathdvara house. It had -albeit reluctantly- become its conqueror and overlord.

In the process, the image of the *tilkāyat* had obviously suffered a major blow in the eyes of his devotees. The authority of the *tilkāyat* and his fellow *māhārājas* rested on the assertion made by Vallabha that there was no distinction between souls (*jīvas*) and Kṛṣṇa, the supreme manifestation of divinity. The Lord and his *jīvas* were really one and are the same entity in the same way that sparks were to a fire. Thus for devotees the *māhārāja* – like all *jīvas* – was a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa, but occupied a very special status because he also acted as the mediating figure that made Kṛṣṇa's grace accessible to the devotee.

Devotees consequently tended not to make an absolute distinction between the *māhārāja* and Kṛṣṇa and instead acknowledged that there was a subtle distinction between the two. The *māhārājas* were not a full manifestation of divinity, but devotees accorded them a type of devotion and reverence that was almost if not equivalent to what Kṛṣṇa himself would receive since they made the divine grace and presence of Kṛṣṇa more immediate for the devotee.

Impey noted that, after the Giridhar affair, devotees within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* were now divided over what was the exact status of the *māhārāja* within the community and to

what extent was he to be honored. It is not clear, however, if Impey understood that this division among devotees concerning the authority of the *mahārājas* was not the direct result of the Giridhar affair. It was, rather, the culmination of a controversy surrounding the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* that had manifested itself as far back as 1855 in Bombay. A certain amount of socio-political context, however, is necessary to make sense of this controversy that occurred around the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. This, consequently, will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Colonial Rule and Religious Reform: A Short History of the Bombay Presidency in the Nineteenth Century

The British had begun to build their empire over the ruins of the Mughal state by a rapid attempt to consolidate their power through the construction of an economic and political infrastructure that would enable a more efficient administration of colonial affairs in the state. The construction of a railway, postal, and telegraph service beginning in the late 1840s along with the annexation of the Princely States had created a country with demarcated boundaries, which would be continually transformed and affected by the actions of its subjects who were tied to colonial authorities through a complex political and economic system that stretched throughout the subcontinent. The increased knowledge that colonial administrators had now gained about Indian culture provided the foundations upon which "Orientalist" scholarship was to be founded as well as the basis for a state-sponsored anglicization program to produce a new indigenous class of professionals, who would be civilized enough by Western values to aid in the administration of their country.

The so-called civilizing mission of the British would generate a wide spectrum of responses within the Indian populace, whose competing visions of an ideal Indian society would be voiced through voluntary and religious organizations as well as being debated in the public arena, in the popular press, and through the British judicial system. The goal of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive account of the religious debates and controversies of the nineteenth century. It instead will attempt to trace the general contours of the religious controversies and debates that occurred in nineteenth century India and how these were embodied most distinctly in the Bombay Presidency during the

nineteenth century. In doing so, the foundation will be provided for the final chapter of this thesis: an exploration how one of these controversies would come to have a direct and adverse effect upon the entire unity of the Puṣṭi Mārga community in the Presidency.

7.1 Orientalist Scholarship and the Colonial Quest for Administrative Order

By the mid-nineteenth century, the British had established themselves firmly as the dominant power in the subcontinent through territorial expansion, and had set in place an administrative and economic infrastructure that sought to efficiently manage colonial interests throughout the subcontinent. Thus the need - at least from the perspective of colonial authorities - was now to create some sort of legal system grounded in indigenous cultural and religious systems that could aid authorities in ruling effectively over their subjects. The training of civil servants in indigenous languages became an integral part of imperial governance as did the use of religious and sacred texts to define and codify, in conjunction with local religious leaders, the beliefs and practices of indigenous religious traditions.

The diversity of opinions in texts and the diversity of religious practice and customs seemed not to matter to colonial information collectors. Texts were gathered and were reduced to one single legal and religious code that came to apply to diverse religious groups who were now reduced to legal categories that fixed the nature of Hindu and Muslim identity and practice. These digests of personal and religious codes for Hindus and Muslims were then used as guides in the application of British common law in the

emerging British civil law system throughout India. Thus caste groups, who were used to regulating their own internal affairs, found their autonomy being infringed upon by colonial administrators. Caste matters relating to issues ranging from religion to property disputes were settled internally through a context-sensitive approach by which each dispute was treated individually and solved according to popular custom and appropriateness for the time and place in which they occurred.¹

The institution of a unified legal system across the three Presidencies ensured that these mechanisms for internal self-governance would be limited severely. All civil and criminal matters from marriage to property disputes were in the hands of colonial legislators, while caste groups were now allowed purely to deal with religious matters that affected caste members as a whole. Prominent religious leaders who had the authority to oversee religious affairs now had lost much of their authority at least in the eyes of the colonial legal system. Religious pedigree, skill in scriptural interpretation, or reverence accorded to them by their devotees no longer mattered. Religious leaders were to be treated as private citizens under the dictates of a legal system, whose values and beliefs were alien to the individuals whose concerns it was supposed to address.

The colonial quest to create separate native legal codes grounded in scriptural texts gave birth to "Orientalist" scholarship that had its origins in India in institutions like the Royal Asiatic Society (1784) and the College of Fort William (1802) in Calcutta. Individuals who were trained in these associations sympathetically attempted to

¹ Amrita Shodhan, "Legal Representations of Khojas and Pushtimarga Vaishnava Politics as Communities: The Aga Khan Case and the Maharaj Libel Case in Mid-Nineteenth Century Bombay" (Phd, University of Chicago, 1995), pp. 56-60. Also see, Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, pp. 57-58.

understand Indian's complexities through mastery of its texts, languages, and belief systems that ultimately elucidated an understanding of Indian history as being a slow descent from a golden age of monotheism in ancient India into a degenerate, superstitious society of little scientific sophistication. Such scholarship ultimately only served to further justify the presence of colonial rule in India. India's first English-medium college - the Hindu College (1832) in Calcutta- was established to not only train Indians to work within the bureaucracy of the colonial empire, but to also serve as a type of finishing school that would produce Indian versions of genteel and refined Englishmen who would be committed to the anglicizing agenda of Governor-General William Bentinck, and support his campaign to reform Indian culture in matters such as widow-burning (*sati*) or female infanticide.²

Indian responses to the social agenda of colonial authorities were unsurprisingly varied. Those such as Henry Derozio, from the Hindu College, embraced Western values wholeheartedly spurning all forms of Indian culture while others, like the conservative Calcutta-based Dharma Society, welcomed English education in India, but stoutly opposed any sort of colonial interference over religious matters such as widow-burning. The English-educated Bengali reformer, Rammohun Roy, on the other hand, had embraced the vocabulary of reform and progress that shaped Bentinck's social agenda but not with the purpose of repudiating Hinduism. Women's reform, the abolition of *sati*, and his rejection of image worship were all designed to strengthen Hinduism by weeding out superstition and corruption in order to return it to its pure and pristine form grounded

² Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, pp. 61-62.

in the monotheism of the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads*. Those who succeeded Roy in the *Brahmo Samāj* movement - Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen - with some modifications continued to champion Roy's vision of a monotheistic Hinduism. Tagore repudiated the validity of the *Vedas* placing greater emphasis on reason and intuition to be the basis for a new rational Hinduism, while Sen would continue Roy's social reform agendas concerning the practice of rituals and the status of women in Hindu society.³

The *Brahmo Samāj* would be followed by similar reform minded organizations like the Ramakrishna Mission, the lower caste *Satyashodhak Samāj* (1873) in Maharashtra, and the *Arya Samāj* (1875) founded by Dayānanda Sarasvatī. Dayānanda came from Gujarat but had enjoyed his greatest amount of success in North India and in the Punjab where he - like other reformers of the nineteenth century - campaigned for widow-remarriage, the education of women, the abolition of child marriage, as well as the abolition of caste distinctions. Dayānanda, however, would be most well known for his vociferous attacks against religious systems, texts, and practices that were not in accord with the *Vedas*. For Dayānanda, the *Vedas* were the product of the Hinduism's Golden Age and set the standard against which all religious behavior and human conduct was to be measured; consequently, he attacked with tremendous ferocity the practices of image veneration and temple worship in Hinduism, and sought to refute Christianity and Islam, which he believed would lead to the extinction of Hindus. This imagined threat from Christianity and Islam is what spurred Dayānanda to advocate the re-conversion and

³ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, pp. 85-87, 114-117.

purification (*śuddhi*) of primarily lower-caste groups he believed had once been Hindu, but had converted to Islam.⁴

The reform movements like the *Brahmo Samāj* and the *Arya Samāj* would prove to be the inspiration for the formation of what would be known as *sabhas*. *Sabhas* consisted of particular caste groups seeking to raise their status in society by agreeing upon adopting a distinctive code of social behavior, engaging in a wide variety of social and philanthropic causes, and by taking advantage of the growth of the vernacular press in the mid-nineteenth century in order to express their social and political agendas in regional languages. The formation of *sabhas*, in other words, represented the means by which newly formed socio-religious associations could assist aspiring social groups in gaining greater prominence in the society around them. Thus *Sabha* members frequently would aspire to higher status by emulating brahminical norms of conduct: advocating strict vegetarianism, forbidding the consumption of alcohol, and an increased amount of involvement in the patronage of religious and cultural events. The nineteenth century, consequently, saw the increasing involvement of princes, landlords, and mercantile communities as cultural and religious patrons who sought to uphold the constancy of Sanskritic Hinduism while trying to respond to the challenges of rapid social and political change.⁵

The increase in religious and cultural patronage on the part of established elites was paralleled by their increasingly close ties with colonial authorities. Their social standing

⁴ The best study of Dayananda remains J. T. F. Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati, His Life and Ideas* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁵ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, pp. 137-140.

was dependant largely on their economic and political well-being and, consequently, it furthered their interests by remaining in favor with those who held the reins of power. Colonial authorities understood this extremely well and used this to their advantage, particularly in the realm of urban planning. Efforts spent on the creation of public police forces, sanitation systems, and even beautification projects such as parks and gardens were all rooted in meeting the needs of growing urban centers such as Delhi, Bombay, or Calcutta, but these efforts were also a means of ensuring the rule of order and law over those whom the British saw as their unruly, unhygienic, and unsophisticated subjects. Thus the recruitment of local notables to sit on municipal boards to increase their already prominent social standings through projects of philanthropy and urban renewal ensured that colonial authorities had support for those civic ideals they believed were for the public good. In local elites, the British found a group of loyal individuals who -like the rulers of the *darbārs*- formed part of the conservative bulwark that would give the appearance of legitimacy to colonial rule in India and its so-called civilizing mission.

The increasing involvement of local elites in philanthropic efforts manifested itself in numerous ways. Urban notables were behind the construction of hospitals and public monuments, and the funding of famine relief efforts as well as private and public colleges. The British believed that these colleges would produce a generation of individuals who would be the equivalent of the refined, genteel, cultured Englishman. Thus, from the ranks of the professional elites that had built close ties with the British, came a new generation of English-educated Indians whose mastery of English gave them a common language that allowed them to express concerns through petitions, journals,

and newspapers. English-educated Indians concerned themselves with hastening India's progress towards modernity in their critiques, not only of superstitions and ritualism, but also of British policies that limited the power of Indian members on government boards and particularly in the Indian Civil Service. Thus, as this new generation of Indians made their voices known, they began to provide competition within the rank of 'traditional' notables out of which they emerged by seeking leadership positions on government councils and eventually in the realm of electoral politics.⁶

7.2 The Foundations of Colonial Rule in the Bombay Presidency

These forces which were at work in Indian society during the nineteenth century could perhaps not be seen more clearly than in the dynamics of politics in the Bombay Presidency. The Presidency was the administrative unit of the British Empire that encompassed Maharashtra and Gujarat with its headquarters being in Bombay where the first governor-general of Bombay, Lord Montstuart Elphinstone, had begun the task of consolidating British rule in Western India.⁷ Elphinstone, however, chose not to follow the lead of his counterparts in other parts of India, where efforts were put into creating standardized legal codes to define the governor's relationship with his subjects. Elphinstone found the wide array of Hindu scriptures with their differing viewpoints to be too dense and contradictory to be helpful in governance, and instead had decided that he

⁶ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, pp. 117-118.

⁷ For a useful study of the Presidency under Elphinstone see, Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Social Policy and Social Change in Western India: 1817-1830* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

would govern on the basis of an Indian civil code which would be based on a digest of Indian customary law gathered from extensive data collection about the various caste groups in the Presidency.⁸

Elphinstone had given a great amount of autonomy to local leaders within caste groups believing them to be indispensable to the administration of justice because of their intimate knowledge of popular customs and daily life. Civil matters relating to issues like marriages, wills, or property inheritance were settled by the British by employing local village councils (*pañcāyat*) to administer justice according to the rules set for arbitration by caste groups themselves. This, however, would change with Elphinstone's departure from Bombay in 1827. The completion of the legal digests that were started under Elphinstone's tenure as governor-general coincided with an increasing insistence on the part of colonial administrators in Bombay to institute a network of civil courts in the Presidency, that would administer justice according to British common law. Elphinstone's model of administering justice had thus become obsolete. British common law took precedence in the adjudication of civil law within the Presidency, while the digests containing the codification of indigenous legal texts and customs were used only in instances where it was clear that there was no state law to help interpret the legal case before the court.⁹ All citizens in the Presidency, regardless of their standing in society or their religious or cultural beliefs were now subject to one universal code that defined proper behavior in a civilized society.

⁸ Shodhan, *Legal Representations*, pp. 62-65.

⁹ Shodhan, *Legal Representations*, pp. 101-103.

7.2.1 The Merchant Communities of the Presidency

The individuals who made up a large part of the Presidency's citizens came primarily from the members of India's wealthy business community from which the *Puṣṭi Mārga* had traditionally derived a large source of its patronage since the time of Vallabha. In the centuries prior to colonial rule, the state of Gujarat made Western India an important force in the economic structure of pre-colonial India because of its longstanding tradition of commercial, financial, and industrial activity. The long coastlines and many harbors made Gujarat an important center for both overseas and inland trade which flourished under the reign of the Delhi Sultanate in the port city of Cambay where traders - collectively known as *vaniyās*- became the driving force behind the Sultanate's economy.

Vaniyā sub-castes (*jātis*) were numerous and cut across religious boundaries. The Khoja, Menon, and Bohra *vaniyās* came from the Islamic mercantile community, the Dasa Oswal *vaniyās* from the Jain community, while the Kapol and Bhatia *vaniyās* were all Hindus, but they all held in common a remarkable resiliency that allowed them to weather the political turmoil that marked the transition from the Sultanate to the Mughal Empire. Thus when the Mughals came to power, *vaniyā* communities continued to maintain their influence under the reign of Mughals.¹⁰ Bhatias, Bhansalis, Kapols, and

¹⁰ For short histories of the major *vaniyā* castes in the Presidency, see R.E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, 3 vols. (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992).

Lohadias, from the Hindu community, for example, cultivated close ties with the Mughals by participating in court politics, accepting key administrative and clerical posts in the Mughal political structure, and, most importantly, by providing the financial capital necessary to maintain the administrative structure of the Mughal empire. For merchants, the financial backing of the Mughal nobility – even if there was no expectation of the loan being repaid – was still a valuable investment for it ensured good relations with those in power. Thus, when a local Muslim jurist (*qāzī*) from Surat began a campaign in 1661 to forcibly convert Hindus to Islam, the merchant community complained to the local governor and then departed to the city of Bharuch until Awrangzīb promised them full protection upon their return to Surat. Merchants, in other words, always worked within the political system and always used its vocabulary of justice. Rocking the political system simply did not make for good financial sense.¹¹

The efforts that the *vaniyā* community put into cultivating close ties with the Mughals paid off handsomely. The port city of Surat replaced Cambay as the subcontinent's premier commercial outlet, and became the center of a number of important trade routes that linked the state to areas both within and outside India. Roads and coastal waterways within Gujarat linked Surat to the manufacturing centers of Bharuch, Cambay, and Ahmedabad; overland trade routes linked Surat to the Mughal heartland in North India; and overseas routes in the Indian Ocean linked Sūrat to the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, Africa, China, and Japan. Surat would retain this prominent

¹¹ For a short history of the *vaniyā* community under the Mughals, see Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, pp. 81-89.

position until the eighteenth century when it went into decline with the disintegration of the Mughal Empire under the emperor Awrangzib. Bombay gradually replaced Surat as the commercial center of Western India. When the British amalgamated Maharashtra and Gujarat in the early nineteenth century to form the Bombay Presidency, Bombay then became the administrative, intellectual, and commercial center of Western India.¹²

The choice of Bombay by colonial authorities was not a random one. When Surat began to lose its prominence as India's most important commercial center, the *vaniyā* community flocked to Bombay in the early part of the nineteenth century to start afresh by building ties with the East India Company. Thus when crown rule replaced the East India Company in the mid-nineteenth century, Bombay was teeming with members of the Gujarati *vaniyā* community. The Parsi community was the most visible and ubiquitous of the *vaniyā* communities in the city and was followed by at least ten different Hindu *vaniyās* subcastes of which the most important were the Kapor Bhatias, who in importance were then followed by the Oswal Jains, and then the Bohras and Menons of the Ismaili community. It was not surprising then to find by the mid-nineteenth century that a disproportionate amount of the city's wealth was concentrated in the hands of a

¹² There has been a very lively debate in scholarly literature concerning the role of the *vaniyā* community in the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. See Karen Leonard, "The 'Great Firm' Theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire," in *The Mughal State: 1526-1750*, ed. Muzzafar and Sanjay Subrahmanyam Alam (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 398-421. Also see Ashin Dasgupta, "Trade and Politics in Eighteenth Century India," in *The Mughal State: 1526-1750*, ed. Muzzafar and Sanjay Subrahmanyam Alam (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 361-398 and Lakshmi Subramanian, "Capital and Crowd in a Declining Asian Port City: The Anglo-Bania Order and the Surat Riots of 1795," *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1985), pp. 205-237. Also see Michelguglielmo Torri, "Surat During the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: What Kind of Social Order? A Rejoinder to Lakshmi Subramanian," *Modern Asian Studies* 21, no. 4 (1987), pp. 679-710.

small number of mercantile families who had made their fortunes in the same way they had during the Mughal period.¹³ British administrators were dependent on mercantile communities for the maintenance of local stability, for knowledge concerning their Indian subjects, and particularly for the indigenous capital which was needed to finance urban reform projects that the colonial administration was sponsoring across the country.

The participation of the *vaniyā* merchant princes (*seṭhs*) in Western India was quite considerable in this context. Major Parsi mercantile families such as the Readymoneys, Wadias, and the Banajis were the driving forces behind the construction of hospitals and public beautification projects such as the construction of parks, and were the financial sources for a number of important charitable institutions in the city. The *vaniyās* from the Hindu community were not far behind their Parsi counterparts. Hindus *vāniyās*, unlike their Jain and Muslim counterparts, could not travel overseas for fear of being excommunicated from their caste groups, thus prompting them to form and control almost all the major banking firms in Bombay. Thus the capital for urban renewal projects and charitable endeavors that were undertaken throughout Western India by colonial authorities were funded by Bombay's major banking institutions, whose Hindu *seṭhs* would frequently join hands with their counterparts within the larger *vaniyā* community to ensure the success of major charitable undertakings.¹⁴

¹³ For a history of the *vaniyā* community in Bombay, see Catherine Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India: Politics and Communities in Bombay City, 1840-1885* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 1-26.

¹⁴ Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*, pp. 20-22.

When famine and plague struck Surat, for example, between 1897 and 1900, it was merchant princes like the Hindu Iswardas Jagjivandas and the Jain Hirachand Jhaveri who were behind the efforts to provide inexpensive grain for the starving populace. Hirachand and Ishwardas were aided in their efforts by the Jain pearl merchant Naginchand Jhaveri from Bombay who helped finance British measures to combat the natural disasters that afflicted Sūrat. These efforts were also accompanied by the patronage of public work projects. Naginchand, for example, was responsible for the construction of a library to honor the governor, George Clark, while Hirachand carefully cultivated his image as a pious Vaiṣṇava through the construction of Hindu temples in Surat and Bombay.¹⁵

Participation in the urban reform endeavors of the nineteenth century was, however, not limited only to aid relief and the construction of public monuments. Members of the mercantile communities were intimately involved in the patronage of educational institutions as a response to the growing demand for schooling among upper-caste residents eager to gain employment in the civil administration, the post office, or railways. The Hindu Raichand and Varajadas families of Bombay were respected for channeling large amount of rupees into the construction of Anglo-Indian vernacular schools in Bombay and Surat while seventeen *seths* from the Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, and Jain communities were members of the prestigious Elphinstone College of Bombay.¹⁶

¹⁵ Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, pp. 123-125.

¹⁶ Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, p. 125 and Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*, p. 32.

Other *seths*, however, participated in urban reform by occupying positions of municipal commissioners and justices of the peace who were directly involved in the administration of municipal affairs. Thirteen *seths* were justices of the peace in Bombay by 1834, and by 1862, five merchants from the Hindu and Jain communities occupied positions as advisors to the governor of the Bombay Presidency.¹⁷

Such extensive participation in the municipal arena did not mean that *seths* fully understood the complexities of British civil politics. *Seths* possessed a limited amount of formal schooling and had absolutely no exposure to English education. Thus the complexities of municipal law, the rules of procedures that governed council meetings, and British rhetoric concerning political and social responsibility were all but lost upon many *seths* who at times never bothered to attend council meetings.¹⁸ This hardly seemed to worry colonial officials headquartered in Bombay. Allying themselves with the Presidency's major mercantile families provided an important linkage to the larger populace and most of all helped to give legitimacy to the presence of colonial rule in India. Thus it was enough for colonial administrators that *seths* were the financial patrons of public works projects and charitable institutions. In these local notables, the British found willing collaborators who would help give legitimacy to colonial rule at the local level in return for the financial benefits that came with cultivating closer ties with the colonial administration. Thus *seths* were able to protect their business interests and at the same time portray themselves as selfless individuals using their wealth for the public

¹⁷ Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁸ Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, p. 149.

good. Thus participation in civil politics was linked not only to the protection of business interests, but also to the key *vaniyā* cultural concept of *ābrū*, or the sustenance of societal prestige and honor in one's larger community.¹⁹

7.2.2 The Emergence of the Western Educated Elite

Securing the investment capital of Bombay's local *seths* to build educational institutions proved to be an important and crucial turn for colonial educational policy in the Presidency, where Elphinstone had endeavored to establish a new educational system that centered on a cluster of institutions located primarily in Bombay. Institutions like Elphinstone College, Wilson College, the University of Bombay or the Government Law School were all founded with the expressed intent of creating a new class of English educated, westernized Indians who could work in the Indian Civil Service to aid in the governance of the subcontinent and in the British mission to civilize India. Institutions like Elphinstone College thus allowed Indians within the Presidency far greater opportunity for social and economic advancement. Students learned a variety of specialized skills that could be put to use after graduation, which included a command of English, a knowledge of British civil and criminal law, debating skills, the art of drafting petitions, and a grounding in parliamentary procedure. The result was the creation of a new class of urban professionals with skills as lawyers, doctors, engineers, revenue

¹⁹ For a discussion of this important *vaniyā*- cultural value, see Hardiman, *Feeding the Vaniyā*, pp. 74-79 and Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, pp. 56-58.

collectors, or magistrates who were now assuming positions of public leadership at both the local and national levels.

English educated professionals claimed that they were superior leaders to *seths* because their knowledge of English and their mastery of the intricacies of English parliamentary and municipal law made it easier to voice public concerns to their colonial overlords through court action, pressure groups, voluntary associations, and particularly newspapers. The nineteenth century thus saw the formation of a number of important dailies primarily by the alumni of Elphinstone College dedicated to the cause of reform in the Presidency. The Marathi reform daily, the *Bombay Samachar*, was founded in 1832 by the Elphinstone educated Bal Gangadhar Shekhar Jambhedkar; the *Rast Goftar* was founded in 1851 by the Elphinstone educated Dadabhai Naoroji of the Parsi community, while the leading English and Gujarati reform newspaper, the *Satya Prakash*, was founded in 1855 by the Kapor *vaniyā* leader, Karsandas Mulji, also educated for a brief period of time at Elphinstone.²⁰ These were followed by the formation of organizations to improve social welfare in the Presidency. Various boys' and girls' schools were founded in Bombay and Surat between 1840 and 1860, the Surat District Co-operative Union was organized towards the end of the nineteenth century to financially assist struggling

²⁰ Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*, pp. 56-68 for an outline of the reform newspapers founded in the Presidency during the nineteenth century.

farmers, while various associations located primarily in Bombay were formed to promote women's education and better treatment for widows.²¹

In founding these organizations, English educated reformers saw themselves as voicing the true spirit of reform and believed that their work in municipal politics would lay the foundation for Indian independence from colonial rule by establishing local self-government in Indian society. The leadership of *seths* was thus regularly criticized by English educated reformers because the merchant princes were considered to be uneducated, backward, and superstitious individuals, whose lack of real concern for public well-being made them unfit to wield influence with the colonial administration. The Bombay reform newspapers such as the *Rast Goftar*, and the, *Satya Prakash* criticized ruling elites from the Parsi and Hindu *vaniyā* communities for not supporting key reform issues such as widow remarriage and women's education and followed these criticisms with attacks on the ostentatious lifestyles of merchant princes and their wasteful spending on lavish religious festivals.²²

In this regard, reformers particularly singled out Hindu *seths* for their extravagant religious celebrations. Their behavior, according to reformers, was indicative of how the great golden age of Hindu monotheism that flourished in ancient India had now degenerated into a corrupt, superstitious religion that held back Indian society from reaching the same degree of progress attained by the British. It was inevitable then that this new class of urban professionals would join hands with religious reform movements

²¹ Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, pp. 152-154.

that had taken root in the Presidency. Allying themselves with such religious organizations allowed the new reform minded intelligentsia to take its message out of the realm of local politics into the larger realm of national politics in the hopes of uniting Indian society under the banner of reform and progress.

One of the most influential religious reform movements in the Presidency would be the *Prārthanā Samāj* in Bombay in 1867. The *Prārthanā Samāj* was dominated almost purely by English-educated reformers from the Marathi brahminical community and drew its inspiration largely from the *Brahmo Samāj* and its emphasis on the rejection of image worship. Its members, who consisted of such luminaries as M.G. Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar, all pledged to reject polytheism for a strict monotheism grounded in a philosophy that emphasized the unity of all religions and the equality of all religious texts.²³ The *Samāj* continued to pursue the traditional reform causes of women's issues, the abolition of caste distinctions and the abolition of child marriage, which was a program equally pursued by yet another reform movement made of English educated *brahmins* by the name of the *Paramahansa Maṇḍālī*. The *Maṇḍālī*, founded in 1829, consisted of Elphinstonians who secretly met to discuss the evils of the caste system and

²² Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, pp. 163-164.

²³ Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India, The New Cambridge History of India ; Iii, 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)., pp. 141-144. For a useful outline of the relationship between *vaniyā* communities and reform movements in the Presidency, see Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*, pp. 246-258.

pledged their loyalty to the larger reform agenda by eating the food prepared by lower castes and, like the *Prārthanā Samāj*, pledging to uphold the equality of all religions.²⁴

The insistence on the supremacy of Vedic revelation by the *Arya Samāj* stood in stark contrast to the beliefs held by the *Maṇḍalī* and the *Samāj*. Although Dayānanda was Gujarati, his influence was felt the most in the Punjab and the United Provinces, and did not make an impact on the Bombay Presidency until 1874. Dayānanda arrived in Bombay in that year and gave a number of discourses attacking the *Prārthanā Samāj* and the Gujarati devotional community known as the *Svāmīnārāyaṇs* whose liturgy was largely influenced by *seva* rituals of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Dayānanda not surprisingly proclaimed that the *Vedas* was the only standard by which any religious beliefs could be measured, and went on to champion the cause of widow remarriage, caste reform, and Vedic education. Dayānanda's message would come to have a deep impact in Bombay whose founding members of the city's first *Arya Samāj* organization came primarily from the ranks of the prominent Hindu Bhatia community. Those who joined the *Arya Samāj* were not educated in Elphinstone, but were all longtime associates of Karsandas Mulji, who used his newspaper, *Satya Prakash*, to launch very pointed attacks against what he believed were the backward and superstitious nature of Hindu *seths*.²⁵ These *seths*, in turn found it very difficult to withstand the attacks coming from reformers, regardless of whether it was the *Arya Samāj* or *Prārthanā Samāj* or the numerous reform dailies that emerged in the Presidency during the nineteenth century. *Seths* simply did not have the

²⁴ Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements*, pp. 139-140.

resources or knowledge to challenge a better educated and organized English-educated class and consequently found themselves having no choice but to make way for a new generation of leaders whose values were very different from their own.

7.3 Conclusion

Thus the steps that the British had taken to create a state that would be manageable and governable had reached their apogee by the late nineteenth century. The British had put into place a governmental structure that tied its administrators to their subjects through a complex set of technological, political, and economic ties that always sought to remind Indians of the political and cultural superiority of Britain. Within the constraints of the British colonial order, however, Indians were constantly at work transforming the society around them. Indians continued to participate and shape debate on the future of Indian society by debating amongst themselves and with their colonial overlords on every conceivable topic ranging from religious reform to Indian self-government through a wide variety of outlets. Debates over religion and politics were played out in newspapers and journals, emerging social groups used socio-religious organizations to make themselves known in Indian society, while new forms of political leadership arose from the elites of Indian society as a result of their relationships with colonial administrators

These larger trends manifested themselves most clearly in Western India in the administrative unit known as the Bombay Presidency where one could see two forms of urban leadership that were competing for recognition by their colonial rulers. One form of leadership was represented by the traditional upper-class *seths* from wealthy mercantile

²⁵ Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*, pp. 254-258.

communities who historically cultivated ties with the dominant holders of power in order to safeguard their financial interests and their social prestige. In the Mughal period, this entailed participating in the politics of court culture and securing the favor of the Mughal elites by providing financial support for the Mughal bureaucracy. In the colonial period, these communities continued to protect their interests by financially supporting projects of urban renewal and holding positions in the British administration at both the state and municipal level.

The relationship between the British and the urban *seths* led in turn to the formation of an English-educated elite who sought to further their agenda of reforming Indian society by cultivating closer ties with the British. This meant greater participation in the arena of civic politics where reformers used their knowledge of the British political system to effect changes in the educational system, municipal politics, and programs of social welfare. Furthering this reform agenda also entailed trying to displace the leadership of *vaniyā seths* who were the leaders of the very castes from which the reformers themselves emerged. Through newspapers, handbills, public debates, and court action, reformers took it upon themselves to demonstrate how the superstitious and backward nature of *seths* had led to the corruption of both religion and society. It was thus inevitable that the focus of reformers would fall upon the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, the Vaiṣṇavite community that represented the dominant form of Hinduism practiced in the Bombay Presidency.

Chapter 8

A Community Divided: The Puṣṭi Mārga and the Maharaja Libel Case

The nineteenth century had proven to be a difficult and tumultuous period for the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Rajasthan. The Nathdvara and Kankaroli houses had come to enjoy much prestige and influence that came with being established *jāgirdārs* in Mewar, but the image of the community had been tarnished by the strained relations between the *darbār* and the Nathdvara house. The whole Giridhar affair had put the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in a rather negative light and it had also put the entire patronage network of the community under a severe amount of stress. Relations between the *darbār* and Nathdvara were at an unprecedented low resulting in a loss of much needed revenue and, by the time the conflict with Giridhar had ended, devotees were split about the status of the *mahārāja* within the community.

This, however, was nothing new for the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. The feelings that devotees had towards their *mahārājas* after the Giridhar affair were the intensification of a crisis of faith that devotees were experiencing in their *mahārāja* when allegations of sexual misconduct by their *gurus* began to surface in Bombay around the mid-nineteenth century. Devotees whose families and fellow caste members had for so long been patrons of the *mahārājas* now found themselves doubting the authority of their spiritual teachers. A heated controversy within the community was sparked, with disaffected members of the new emerging English educated *vaniyā* community in Bombay publicly attacking the Bombay *mahārāja* in the public press. The scandal that emerged from these attacks – known popularly as the Maharaja Libel Case - and how it would adversely effect the

mahārajā-devotee relationship within the community is the subject of this final chapter of the thesis.

8.1 The Growth and Consolidation of the Puṣṭi Mārga Presence in the Bombay Presidency

The *Puṣṭi Mārga* had made its presence felt in Western India when Vallabha and Gopināth both built a small devotee base in Gujarat during their travels in India, but it was under Viṭṭhalnāth that the *Puṣṭi Mārga* became an established presence in the state. Viṭṭhalnāth, concerned with expanding the influence of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, undertook six fundraising trips to Gujarat between 1543 and 1582 and succeeded in winning over large number of *vaniyās* from the Bhatia, Gujar, Kapol, and Lohana classes who embraced the *Puṣṭi Mārga* enthusiastically.¹ The *Puṣṭi Mārga* offered to these communities a life-affirming religious view that was compatible with their worldly pursuits and membership in the community offered them much prestige and opportunities for social mobility. With its emphasis on a householder life grounded in strict vegetarianism, simplicity, restraint, and frugality, membership in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* conferred upon *vaniyās* the status of *brahmins* in Gujarati society. This newly adopted status in turn allowed them the opportunity to display their riches by dedicating their wealth for the *seva* of Kṛṣṇa.

Thus the relationship between the *vaniyā* communities and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* proved to be advantageous for both sides. For the *vaniyā* community, the strict observance of

¹ See Chapter 3 for details of the spread of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Gujarat under the leadership of Viṭṭhalnāth.

purity regulations, vegetarianism, and the regular practice of service (*seva*) helped to cultivate the image of *vaniyās* as pious individuals who used their wealth for the loving service of the Lord. With the establishment of Nathdvara, land grants donating villages to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Rajasthan continued on an annual basis well into the nineteenth century and thus firmly established the presence of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and nearby Bombay. In 1811, the *mahārāja* Gokulnāth had established the *Puṣṭi Mārga*'s first temple in Bombay and was succeeded by *mahārāja* Jīvanlāl during the second half of the nineteenth century. Other *mahārājas* soon followed suit and by 1860, seventy had established themselves throughout the Bombay Presidency of which five lived in the city of Bombay.

8.1.1 Reform Criticism of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*

The influence of the *mahārājas* over the *vaniyā* communities in the Presidency came to be quite considerable by the mid-nineteenth century. *Seṭhs* of the major *vaniyā* communities regularly donated a portion of their business profits to the *mahārāja*, they made offerings of saffron, jewelry, and foodstuffs for the purpose of *seva*, and they collected taxes for the *mahārājas* during the celebration of major life events such as births or marriages.² *Seṭhs* also became the vehicles through which *mahārājas* enforced their authority over the *vaniyā* subcastes that made up the body of *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees.

² Amrita Shodhan, "Legal Representations of Khojas and Pushtimarga Vaishnava Polities as Communities: The Aga Khan Case and the Maharaj Libel Case in Mid-Nineteenth Century Bombay" (Phd, University of Chicago, 1995), pp. 165-166.

When the Bombay *mahārājas* found themselves embroiled in a dispute with Śaivite *brahmin* community in a Bombay suburb in 1855, the *mahārājas* used Bhatia *seths* to organize a boycott of the *brahmins* and to enforce a threat of ostracizing those *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees who would associate with the *brahmin* community. In 1858, the *mahārāja* of Bombay persuaded members of the Kapol and Bhatia *vaniyā* communities to punish any journalist who publicly disagreed with him. In that same year, the same *mahārāja* denied devotees access to the community's main temple for eight days unless the *seths* of the leading *vaniyā* communities promised to refrain from publicly criticizing the *mahārāja*, and would take steps to ensure that he would never have to make an appearance in a British court.³ A year later, the very same *seths* who agreed to the *mahārāja*'s terms were behind an out-of-court settlement with an elderly widow who sued a *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārāja* in Bombay for his attempts to extort property and money from her.⁴

It did not mean, however, that the authority of the *mahārāja* was absolute over their devotees. Bhatia *vaniyās* in Gujarāt were successful in their attempts to expel four *mahārājas* from Mandvi for alleged acts of immorality, and thus set an example for their Bhatia brethren in Bombay who, as an act of caste solidarity, threatened a *mahārāja* with political and legal action in order to protect a fellow Bhatia from being excommunicated.⁵ When issues of sexual allegations against *mahārājas* became known in 1855, the Bhatias

³ Shodhan, *Legal Representations*, pp. 174-175.

⁴ Shodhan, *Legal Representations*, pp. 166-167.

⁵ Shodhan, *Legal Representations*, pp. 168-169.

convened a meeting in an effort to put an end to the *mahārājas*' behavior. They attempted to ban their womenfolk from visiting *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* and then attempted to lobby Jivanlāl, the senior most *mahārāja* of Bombay, to use his power to restrain his fellow *mahārājas* from indulging in sexual excesses. Disaffected elements within the *vaniyā* community found themselves having to reject caste authority in order to exert pressure within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* for the reform of what they viewed as the questionable behavior of the *mahārājas*. Anonymous articles critical of the *mahārājas* began appearing in the reform papers known as the *Raft Gofar* decrying the *mahārājas* use of their power to engage in caste politics. That same year the leading *vaniyā* reformer within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, Lakhmidas Khimji, sued the editor of a Gujarati daily who published articles severely rebuking reformers within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* at the alleged instigation of Jivanlāl.

Such efforts to maintain some measure of control over the *mahārājas* through demonstrations of caste solidarity were never fully effectual. Their *mahārājas* were still spiritual leaders of a religious community that for generations was central to the religiosity of Gujarati Vaiṣṇavas and the failure to accord the *mahārājas* proper respect was an insult to longstanding *vaniyā* traditions that could indeed result in total banishment from one's subcaste. Critics within the community thus found themselves having to buckle underneath an enormous amount of pressure from their fellow devotees. This was certainly the case with Lakhmidas when he had instigated his legal suit against the newspaper editor whom he believed had libeled him in print. When Jivanlāl was

summoned to testify on behalf of the newspaper editor, the *mahārāja* used his supporters within the *vaniyā* community to circulate an agreement to devotees stating that they would ostracize any individual who sought to malign the *mahārāja* in court or in print. When *Puṣṭi Mārga* temples were shut to devotees until they would sign the agreement, women devotees began to publicly beat their breasts to denounce Lakhmidas and his supporters for having brought the *mahārāja* into court. Lakhmidas and other prominent *seṭhs* who were critical of Jivanlāl finally gave in. They signed the document.⁶

The affair surrounding Jivanlāl's efforts to silence criticism within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* only served to intensify criticisms, which came primarily from Karsandas Mulji, the Elphinstone Kapol *vaniyā* reformer who was the editor of the *Satya Prakash*.⁷ Mulji's ancestors were one of the first group of *vaniyās* to have emigrated from Kathiawad to Bombay and consequently, his family was held in high esteem among the Bombay *vaniyā* community because they were a highly respectable and affluent orthodox Hindu family who were highly observant members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Mulji's family was thus able to afford him an education in both Gujarati and English medium schools including an extremely short lived stint in Elphinstone College.

His studies at the latter institution came to an end within less than a year when his family terminated his financial support and disowned him after learning he broached the

⁶ Shodhan, "Legal Representations", pp. 173-176.

⁷ The following biographical sketch about Mulji is taken from the biography by his admirer and close associate, B.N. Motiwala, *Karsondas Mulji* (Bombay: Prabhudas Ladhabsai Mody, 1932).

topic of widow remarriage in an essay written for a competition in Elphinstone in 1853. A penniless Mulji, now out of Elphinstone and ostracized by his own family members, had decided to take up reform causes to make a living championing the cause of women and the downtrodden. He used his position as a schoolmaster in government schools to espouse reform causes by establishing the *Buddhi Hindu Vardhak Sabha*, and by contributing to Bombay based reform journals in order to challenge what he saw as the superstitious and ultra-orthodox values of the *vaniyā* community.

By 1857, Mulji, had become a celebrity in Bombay reform circles. He had become well known for his support of women's issues and caused a stir by openly championing the ability of *vaniyās* to travel overseas without fearing excommunication from their *jātis*. Mulji's celebrity status, however, rested primarily on his pointed attacks against the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* of Bombay in his journal *Satya Prakash*. Despite having a basic understanding of *Braj Bhāṣa* and no knowledge whatsoever of Sanskrit, Mulji nonetheless claimed that his status as a devotee gave him a special insight into the doctrines of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the inner workings of the community. Mulji levied charges of sexual impropriety against the *mahārājas* by alleging that the act of throwing red powder at women during the spring festival of *Holi* was a ruse by *mahārājas* to single out women for sexual relations. Mulji went on to criticize *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotional poetry describing the celebrated love relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the married milkmaids of Braj. The lovemaking of the *gopīs* and Kṛṣṇa was meant as a metaphor to express how

the devotee should cultivate a passionate yearning and love for Kṛṣṇa. but for Mulji, this was indicative of how *Puṣṭi Mārga* literature encouraged sexual depravity.⁸

Mulji narrowly escaped being excommunicated from the Kapol community for calling the agreement circulated by Jivanlāl to protect him from legal action a “slavery bond,” and made his most pointed attack came in 1860 when he published a tract in the *Satya Prakash* claiming the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was a heretical Hindu sect whose very theological doctrines advocated the sexual mistreatment of women. Mulji argued that Hindu scriptures declared that any religious sects that appeared during the current period of spiritual degeneracy (*kāli yuga*) were heretical and therefore it followed that the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* were heretics who deviated from the true Hinduism found in ancient Hindu scriptures. The heretical nature of the community, Mulji continued, was emphasized by the very theology of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Mulji pointed to a Sanskrit commentary written by Vallabha’s grandson, Gokulnāth, and argued that the commentary explicitly stated that the dedication of one’s possessions to Kṛṣṇa included offering up wives and daughters for the pleasure of the *mahārāja*.⁹

⁸ Shodhan, “Legal Representations”, p. 161.

⁹ The infamous 1860 editorial can be found in Mulji, *History of the Sect of the Maharajas*, pp. 172-175. This text was originally published anonymously by Mulji and it contains Mulji’s interpretation of *Puṣṭi Mārga* rituals and doctrines, samples of testimony given at the trial, and the judgements given in the Maharaja Libel Case. Mulji’s publication, however, was not complete and the transcript of the entire trial would be later reprinted in 1911 as Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case Including Bhattia Conspiracy Case, No. 12047 of 1861, Supreme Court Plea Side: Jadunathjee Birzattanjee Maharaj Vs.*

The response from the Bombay *mahārājas* was to call the well-known *mahārāja* of Surat, Jadunāth Brijratna, to Bombay in 1860. Jadunāth came with the expectation that he would deflect reform attacks by engaging reformers in public debates on various religious topics including the scriptural validity of the comments made by reformers concerning the heterodox nature of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Thus Jadunāth participated in one debate against the reformer Narmadashankar Lalshankar concerning widow remarriage and scored a minor victory for the *Puṣṭi Mārga* when Narmadashankar admitted he did not believe that Hindu scriptures were divinely inspired. The debate was followed by a heated exchange of words between the reformers and Jadunāth in the public press. Mulji continued his attacks in his newspaper while Jadunāth printed handbills and started a Gujarāti journal of his own in order to publicly denounce reform allegations. The turning point in the war of words between Jadunāth and Mulji was the latter's 1860 tract denouncing the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* as heretics who habitually engaged in sexual indiscretions. In his tract, Mulji singled out Jadunāth and appealed to him to reform the ways of the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas*. Jadunāth's response was quite extraordinary. It seemed that for whatever reason he had enough of debates and newspaper articles. Jadunāth instead sued Mulji and his printer for libel in the High Court of Bombay.

Karsondass Mooljee and Nanabhai Rustamji (Bombay: D. Lukhmidass, 1911). All references to testimony from the case are taken from the 1911 edition of the entire trial.

8.2 The Maharaja Libel Case

The defense's response to the suit was to deny that Mulji's comments were directed against Jadunāth's private character. Mulji's defense lawyer argued that his client had no intention of personally maligning Jadunāth and, on the contrary, had great respect for the *mahārāja* because of his support for women's education and his participation in public debates. In other words, Jadunāth was a high-profile individual who had shown some sympathy for reformist causes and thus it was expected that he would take seriously calls to reform the office of the *mahārāja*. The reformers continued to argue that the comments that Mulji made in his newspaper were hardly libelous because they were not directed at Jadunāth in a private capacity, but in his capacity as a religious leader. Thus the defense sought to portray Jadunāth as a religious leader whose intention was to reinforce his opinions by using the secular court system to punish Mulji for what was the spiritual offence of heresy. Secular courts had no jurisdiction over such matters and since there were no ecclesiastical court in India to try such an offence, the *mahārāja*'s lawsuit could not be tried at all.¹⁰

Defense attempts to throw out the petition failed. One of the two ruling judges hearing the case, Judge Matthew Sausse, stated that there was no legal precedent that exempted religious leaders from the jurisdiction of secular courts. The judge instead agreed with the plaintiff's assertion that regardless of his position, Jadunāth was like any

¹⁰ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaja Libel Case*, pp. 11-12.

other private citizen who was entitled to use the law for the protection of his reputation. The libel case would thus continue, but not with the purpose of determining the validity of Mulji's comments in the light of the authority of Hindu scriptures. Mulji's statements would not be considered to be libelous if it could be proven that Jadunāth's actions were an offence to public morality. There would be no theological debate over the propriety of Mulji's comments, there would be no value given to the theology of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, and no value would be given to Jadunāth's authority as a *guru* and as a descendant of the great philosopher, Vallabha. Jadunāth was now treated like a regular citizen of the British crown whose actions were now being evaluated in the light of a code of universal morality to which judges believed all human beings were subject.¹¹

Jadunāth had thus successfully used the colonial legal system to win his day in court against Mulji, but at the same time he continued to use the more traditional means of using the *seths* in the *vaniyā* community to advance his cause against Mulji. Jadunāth instructed his loyalists amongst the leading *seths* in the *vaniyā* community to convene a meeting of devotees to ensure their loyalty to his cause by threatening them with excommunication from the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and their subcastes if they testified against him in court. When the meeting came to the attention of the High Court, the two *seths* who convened the meeting of about two hundred Bhatia *vaniyās* were convicted for engaging

¹¹ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 37-39.

in mass witness tampering and were ordered to pay fines to the court as punishment for their actions.¹² The meeting thus proved to be something of an embarrassment for Jadunāth not only because it was deemed to be a legally dubious act, but because it eventually revealed that devotees within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* were not unanimous in their support for Jadunāth and the other *mahārājas*. Some unhesitatingly supported Jadunāth, others felt torn between their loyalty to their *mahārājas* and the fact they believed the allegations of sexual impropriety, while those represented by Karsandas and Lakhmidas were hardly impressed with Jadunāth's attempt at witness tampering.

Jadunāth thus found himself in a very difficult position on the eve of the libel case. His strategy to win the libel trial by trying to silence any opposition through the use of caste politics failed, leaving him to fend for himself in the unfamiliar world of the colonial legal system, to which he had now surrendered all his religious authority. Standing in the background, meanwhile, was a very fragmented *Puṣṭi Mārga* community. The *vaniyā* community which had been generous patrons of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* found itself divided as the two competing forms of urban leadership within the community were now pitted against each other over the issue of moral leadership in the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Caught in the middle of this dispute were the large number of devotees trying to understand the status of the *mahārājas* in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and to decide to what extent they owed loyalty to individuals who for generations had been their spiritual leaders. Thus, while

¹² This is what came to be known as the "Bhattia Conspiracy Case." See, Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 69-91.

legal definitions of libel and the question of proper moral behavior were to become issues in the course of the trial, so too would one more issue: defining the relationship between the *mahārāja* and his devotees.

8.2.1 The Case for the Plaintiff

Jadunāth put up his defense by drawing upon a number of *vaniyā* devotees to act as character witnesses on his behalf. The prominent *seṭh* of Bombay, Gopaldas Madhavdas, acknowledged Jadunāth as the spiritual leader of the Bhatia community, but he claimed that he had no knowledge whatsoever of any improprieties carried out by Jadunāth and any other *mahārāja* in the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Whether the *mahārājas* were either gods or humans was a question to which Gopaldas hesitated. He simply could not tell if the *mahārājas* were either gods or humans, but he asserted, nonetheless, that they deserved to be worshipped with the mind, property, and the bodies of their followers. This consisted of devotees receiving *mahārājas* in their home, offering donations of money or luxury items, and prostrating before them. Whether this included the offering of women devotees to the *mahārājas* was unclear for Gopaldas, but he would find it permissible if Hindu scriptures sanctioned such an action.¹³

The *mahārājas*, Gopaldas continued, were the religious guides of the *vaniyā* community and arbitrators of caste disputes who were so honored by devotees that they

¹³ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, p. 126

were even considered to be superior to *brahman̄s*. He went on to explain that since only the *mahārāja* were allowed to worship the images of Kṛṣṇa installed in *Puṣṭi Mārga* temples, devotees performed their own version of worship but directed towards the *mahārāja*. Scents would be applied to the *mahārāja*, food would be offered to him, worshippers would bow down in front of him waiting for his blessings or even cradle him in a swing in the same manner that the image of Kṛṣṇa is worshipped by placing him in swing (*jhūla*). Gopaldas stated that it was common place for devotees to eat the leftovers of the *mahārājas*' meals, believing it to be consecrated food (*prasād*) and that some individuals even drank the water that was rinsed from the clothes of a *mahārāja*.¹⁴

Gopaldas, however, asserted quite emphatically that he had no knowledge of sexual improprieties on the part of any *mahārāja* and that he could not state conclusively whether the *mahārāja* was worshipped in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* as a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. In his own mind, there was a shade of difference between the worship performed towards Kṛṣṇa and the veneration of the *mahārāja* for the *mahārāja* was not bathed and clothed in the way that Kṛṣṇa was done according to *Puṣṭi Mārga seva*. Thus , Gopaldas explained, that when he prostrated in front of a *mahārāja* he viewed him not as Kṛṣṇa but as a *guru* worthy of veneration. He did know of some individuals within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* who did venerate the *mahārāja* as a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa, but ultimately Gopaldas stated that he could not give any statement as to how pervasive this belief was within the *Puṣṭi*

¹⁴ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 128-129.

Mārga.¹⁵

Jumnadass Sevaklal's testimony was similar in nature to that of Gopaldās. He asserted that there was never any evidence to suggest acts of impropriety on the part of the *mahārāja*, and he continued to assert that he had no knowledge of alleged secret orgies within the *Puṣṭi Mārgā*. He stated frankly that he failed to see the connection between sex and the throwing of red powder during *Holi*. Jumnadass went on to describe in his testimony the type of treatment that was accorded to the *mahārājas* of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. He detailed how his own family members would eat food left over by the *mahārāja* and how the *mahārāja* would be pushed in a swing along with the image of Kṛṣṇa during festivals. He then explained in an extremely rudimentary fashion that what made the *mahārāja* so important in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* that he was placed on a level that was near Kṛṣṇa himself. Jumnadass stated that what made a *mahārāja* like Jadunāth so important was his administration of the *brahmasambandha mantra* which purified the devotee and set him off on the Path of Grace. Jadunāth was therefore a representative of Kṛṣṇa, and hence a spiritual guide or *guru*.¹⁶

When asked if the *mahārāja* was a god, in his own right, Jamunadass was left confused. The defense lawyer and the judge both thought Jamunadass to be evasive and threatened him twice with jail time if he refused to give a direct answer to the question. Thus when Jamunadass was asked again if the *guru* was a god, all Jamunadass could state

¹⁵ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 130-131.

was that finally stated that the “*guru* was the *guru*” and he was unaware of any consensus within the community as to whether or not the *guru* was considered to be a god in human form. He knew of people who worshipped the *mahārājas* as gods, but he himself viewed Jadunāth as a spiritual teacher and that was sufficient for him.¹⁷

Thirty-five witnesses were called in total to vouch as character witnesses for the plaintiff. All were members of the *vaniyā* community who claimed their loyalty to Jadunāth and did their best to defend the *mahārājas* with their rudimentary explanations of *Puṣṭi Mārga* theology. None of the witnesses had a knowledge of Sanskrit or *Braj Bhāṣa* nor were they always correct in their factual information about the history of the community. Matters were not helped at all by Jadunāth who took the stand on the nineteenth day of the trial. Jadunāth claimed knowledge of Sanskrit, *Braj Bhāṣa*, and Gujarati, but then undermined his credibility as a learned teacher by admitting he had never read any theological text in *Braj Bhāṣa* on the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. He went on to admit that he did not know the contents of certain texts which appeared to sanction the type of reverence paid to the *mahārājas* in temples and at one point in his testimony misidentified Kankaroli as being the location of the Śrīnāthjī temple.¹⁸

Jadunāth, nonetheless, made an impassioned defense of his community and emphatically denied reform allegations concerning the divinity of the *mahārājas* insisting

¹⁶ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 132-134.

¹⁷ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁸ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 348, 354-355.

that they were not identical with Kṛṣṇa. Only Vallabha was a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa while his descendants were mere mortals who were honored by devotees as the spiritual guides of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Jadunāth acknowledged that certain devotees ate the food leavings of *mahārājas* and that saffron, scented water, and oils were applied to the body of the *mahārājas*, but he maintained that this behavior was in accordance with Hindu scriptures.¹⁹ Since the *mahārājas* were the only individuals allowed to perform *seva* to the image of Kṛṣṇa, the devotees would offer their worship instead to the *mahārāja*.²⁰

Jadunāth went on to state that neither he nor other *mahārāja* engaged in adultery, all accusations of sexual impropriety with his female devotees were false, and no *mahārāja* condoned sexual orgies and adultery within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Adulterous love was indeed a part of Vaiṣṇavite scriptures, Jadunāth contended, but referred to the acts of lovemaking between Kṛṣṇa and the married milkmaids of Vrindavana. This description, Jadunāth maintained, was not an endorsement of infidelity. The illicit love between Kṛṣṇa and the milkmaids was a metaphor to express the relationship between the individual and the Divine. Adulterine love is intensely passionate in nature, and the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* represented the type of intense longing that was to be

¹⁹ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 355-356.

²⁰ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pg. 355.

cultivated by the devotee and directed solely towards God.²¹ With these final words, Jadunāth blessed the court and left the witness stand.

8.2.2 Arguments for the Defense

The case laid out by the defense was considerably more thorough and complex than the series of denunciations of Mulji's charges that came from Jadunāth and the other witnesses for the plaintiff. The goal of the defense was to present Mulji as a selfless crusader on a quest to reform the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, so it was not surprising, then, that Karsandas Mulji first took the stand on the seventh day of the trial with the purpose of laying the foundation for the defense's central argument: that the tyrannical *mahārājas* subscribed to religious teachings that encouraged sexual licentiousness in Indian society. Thus, Mulji charged, if there was anyone who should be sued for libel it should be Jadunāth. It was Jadunāth who publicly ridiculed Mulji in his own newspaper, it was Jadunāth who warned his devotees of being in the bad company of the reformers, and it was Jadunāth who tried to use his authority to have Mulji excommunicated from the Kapol Bhatia caste.²² Other arguments that Mulji used on the stand, however, were not new. He reiterated the charges made in his 1860 editorial concerning the heterodox nature of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the profligacy of the *mahārājas*, but to this he added that the

²¹ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 360-361.

²² Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 234-235.

Puṣṭi Mārga hardly represented “true” Hinduism. The pure and pristine Hinduism of Vedic times practiced mortification, self-denial, and penance, but the *mahārāja* hardly represented such a religion when they were demanding that devotees dedicate their wives and daughters to them for their personal enjoyment.²³

Mulji’s arguments were then confirmed by Rev. John Wilson, a missionary who was used by the defense to buttress Mulji’s claims concerning the heterodoxy of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Wilson’s credentials were indeed quite impressive. He possessed knowledge of Sanskrit and medieval Hindi and claimed to have a mastery over the *Vedas*, Hindu mythological literature (*purāṇas*) and Hindu legal texts. He belonged to a number of learned societies and had even been offered the position of Oriental Translator to the colonial administration, which he rejected in favor of being a missionary. Wilson was thus presented to the court as an authority of Hinduism and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* despite having no intimate contact with *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees. Wilson instead referred to works on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* written by the prominent Indologist of the time, Professor Horace Hyman Wilson. Rev. Wilson quoted Prof. Wilson’s lengthy description of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* as a householder community that was unique for their sensual and lavish practice of *seva*. Prof. Wilson, however, did not mean this as a compliment. The *mahārājas* did not practice the ascetic lifestyle of true Hinduism and their lack of erudition hardly made

²³ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, p. 251-253.

them worthy of notice. If they were accorded any veneration at all it was simply because the *mahārājas* had inherited the charisma of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalaṇāth.²⁴

Rev. Wilson then continued with his own commentary on the *mahārāja*. Wilson confidently stated that the *Puṣṭi Mārga mahārājas* were worshipped as manifestations of Kṛṣṇa and used their power to ensure the blind loyalty of their devotees. *Puṣṭi Mārga* theological treatises, according to Wilson, threatened devotees with rebirth in hell if they did not pay proper respect to the *mahārāja*. Wilson then reaffirmed Mulji's translation of Gokulnāth's commentary as an accurate translation that affirmed the dedication of devotees' wives and daughters to the *mahārājas*.²⁵ Wilson, however, expanded upon Mulji's editorial of 1860 by reiterating a theme already stated by the latter in his own testimony: the *Puṣṭi Mārga* deviated from the restraint, self-control, and purity of true Hinduism for a life of shame and indecency. Thus the *Puṣṭi Mārga* like all present forms of Hinduism being practiced in India, was a pale reflection of the true Hinduism that once existed in ancient India. The *mahārājas*, concluded Wilson, abused their powers as religious preceptors by engaging in a type of obscene conduct that proved just how much India was mired in the practices of morally degenerate religions.²⁶

The obscene conduct to which Wilson referred on the stand was confirmed by the defense's other two expert witnesses. The first of these witnesses, Dr. Bhau Daji, a

²⁴ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 256-258

²⁵ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 205-207.

physician to Jadunāth, reluctantly made the admission to the court that he had treated Jadunāth and two other *Puṣṭi Mārgā mahārājas* for syphilis, which he obviously attributed to their sexual indiscretions with their female devotees. According to Daji, the alleged sexual indiscretions of the *mahārājas* were taken up with Jivanlāl, the most prominent of the *mahārāja* in Bombay, but Jivanlāl refused to take action against any *mahārāja* accused of wrongdoing because he felt that he was unable to control their actions.²⁷ This testimony was then corroborated by the defense's other expert witness, Dhiraj Dalpatram, a physician who also claimed to have treated Jadunāth for syphilis. According to Dalpatram, Jadunāth himself admitted to the doctor that he had contracted the disease from sexual relations with a female devotee, and had come to the doctor desperate for some mercury that would cure his illness.²⁸

The testimony of both doctors was finally corroborated by a set of witnesses who were paraded in front of the court to testify to the sexual indiscretions of the *mahārājas*. The most important of these witnesses and, in some ways, the most damaging was Mathuradass Lowjee. Lowjee, a Bombay merchant well-known in Bhatia circles who had been raised from infancy in the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, had maintained his theological commitment to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* but refused to honor the *mahārājas* after the accusations of sexual misconduct began to surface in 1855. Lowjee would regularly visit the Bombay

²⁶ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 260-261.

²⁷ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 286-287.

²⁸ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 292-293.

temple, but would remain a respectful distance away from the *mahārāja* refusing to touch his feet or eat his leftovers. In addition, Lowjee forbid his wife to ever visit the temple in order to prevent any possibility of sexual misconduct.²⁹

Lowjee testified to the fact that the majority of the Bhatia caste literally believed Vallabha, Viṭṭhalnath, and all the *mahārājas* to be manifestations of *Kṛṣṇa*, worshipping the *mahārājas* with the exact same epithets and prayers that would be used to worship *Kṛṣṇa* himself. Prominent members of the Bhatia caste were said to have “Ras Mandalis” where they would re-enact the circle dance that *Kṛṣṇa* performed with the milkmaids of Braj prior to making love to each of them and Lowjee went one step further by describing how he experienced the shock of witnessing a *mahārāja* named Vacchalal having sexual relations with a female devotee in his bedroom.³⁰ What seemed to upset Lowjee even more was that when he asked Jivanlāl, the senior *mahārāja* of Bombay about the allegations, Jivanlāl, claimed that he could not do anything to immediately stop what was alleged to be occurring. Sexual desire, like opium, was an addiction to men that would be difficult to immediately stop. Most of all, Jivanlāl maintained, taking a step to prevent women from visiting temples would not be appropriate given that women’s donations were a major source of income for *Puṣṭi Mārga* shrines. Thus, Jivanlāl stated, according

²⁹ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 280-281.

³⁰ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, p. 276.

to Lowjee, that it would be to the financial detriment to the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to restrict women from visiting temples in the city.³¹

Lakhmidas Khimji served to confirm Mathuradass' testimony concerning the *mahārāja* by stating that he had known Jadunāth for a decade and not only witnessed the *mahārāja* squeeze the breasts of a fourteen year girl, but he had stumbled across the *mahārāja* in his private quarters having intercourse with the girl. Lakhmidas then continued to claim that on two separate occasions he had viewed a widow close to Jadunāth arrange for married women to have sexual intercourse with him in his private chambers.³² A similar claim was equally made by Kalabhai Lalubhai who stated that he had seen Jadunāth sexually involved with young women of which one was a fourteen year old girl.³³ In total, thirty defense witnesses were unanimous in their testimony: there were indeed *mahārājas*, including Jadunāth, who were engaging in a variety of sexual indiscretions that were well-known, but ignored by Jīvanlāl, the most prominent *mahārāja* in Bombay.

³¹ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 278-279.

³² Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 293-294.

³³ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 301-302.

8.2.3 The Final Judgement

The use of expert witnesses proved to be most successful. Justice Joseph Arnould, one of the two judges hearing the case, was impressed by the unimpeachable credentials of the Bhau Daji and particularly Rev. Wilson who, for the judge, put the whole trial in its proper perspective. The historical overview that Wilson provided to the court proved the extent to which the doctrines of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* had deviated from the Hinduism practiced in India's glorious past by celebrating adulterous love and the worshipping of mere mortals as divine beings.³⁴ Bhau Daji – considered by Arnould to be one of the foremost citizens in Bombay – had only served to strengthen Wilson's conclusions with his first hand testimony concerning the worship of the *mahārājas* and his treatment for Jadunāth's alleged cases of syphilis.³⁵ According to Arnould, therefore, there was nothing false about the charges made by Mulji in the *Satya Prakash*, nor was there any evidence to prove that Mulji singled out Jadunāth in his editorial. In Arnould's eyes, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was a debauched and degraded form of Hinduism full of theosophical nonsense and loose morals. Mulji, Arnould concluded, did no wrong in exposing the immoralities of the *mahārājas*. He merely fulfilled the duties of a journalist and public reformer to expose and denounce evil and barbarous practices. Mulji's expose of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was thus viewed as a courageous act of public service.³⁶

³⁴ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 438-450.

³⁵ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 447-451.

³⁶ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pg. 480.

The second ruling judge of the case, Chief Justice Matthew Sausse, however, did not quite affirm the conclusions of his colleague. Sausse too was impressed by what he felt were the unimpeachable credentials of the two doctors, Bhau Daji and Dhiraj Dalpatram, and he was equally impressed by the corroborating evidence provided by Mathuradas Lavji and Lakhmibai Khimji, the two witnesses who claimed they saw Jadunāth engaging in sexual relations with his female devotees. For Sausse, therefore, the defense was successful in proving the charges of licentiousness against Jadunāth as they were in proving the heterodoxy of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* through their use of expert witness, Rev. Wilson.³⁷ Thus Sausse lauded the defense for setting forth a compelling case that proved the depravity of the *Puṣṭi Marga*, but it was not enough to absolve the defendant of Jadunāth's libel charge. Mulji had argued that there was a justifying occasion for the publication of his article which absolved him of the charge of libel, but Sausse ruled that the choice of a forum as public as a widely read newspaper to resolve a private matter within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was the strongest proof one could possibly have of malice. This, in turn, nullified Mulji's argument that the context in which he wrote the article formed a justifying occasion.

Jadunāth, Sausse continued, did not provoke Mulji into writing his 1860 editorial, nor was there any clear evidence that Mulji's editorial really served the public's interest. The events described in Mulji's 1860 editorial were, according to Sausse, a private matter and a finding in Mulji's favor would set a dangerous legal precedent where newspaper

³⁷ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 410-418.

editors, on the basis of hearsay or personal animosity, could launch attacks on the private lives of individuals in the name of public morality. Sausse's judgement – which would become the final judgement of the case – was clear. Even if the charges of depravity were proven, Mulji had no direct interest in exposing what was matter of a private nature, and consequently, he slandered Jadunāth without reason.³⁸ Sausse, being the senior judge, overruled Arnould, found Mulji guilty of libel, and awarded Jadunāth damages in the amount of a mere five rupees.

Jadunāth thus scored what amounted to a Pyrrhic victory. From a legal standpoint he had won his battle with Mulji but it came at the tremendous expense of tarnishing the reputation of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and revealing the broad divisions among devotees over the position of the *mahārāja* within the community. Jadunāth and his devotees who made up the *vaniyā* elites of the Presidency operated firmly within the context of communities where caste was the dominant form of social organization. Groups were ranked hierarchically with the *mahārāja* taking a position of pre-eminence because of the reverence paid to them as the *gurus* who reconciled the devotee with Kṛṣṇa through the administration of the *brahmasambandha mantra*. Thus as long as the *mahārāja* stayed within the comfortable world of royal and mercantile patrons who felt duty bound to accord them reverence as spiritual leaders, the *mahārājas* would be able to maintain their time honored status as *gurus*, whose patronage gave both societal status and spiritual merit to the devotees who revered them. This, in turn, meant that the *mahārājas* held

³⁸ Supreme Court of India, *Maharaj Libel Case*, pp. 415-419.

enough power to enforce their authority over their *vaniyā* communities not only through arbitration, but also by manipulation and coercion particularly when situations like accusations of sexual misconduct could prove threatening to the *mahārājas*' financial well-being.

The disaffected members within the *vaniyā* community represented by the likes of Mulji and Khimjee, however, managed to circumvent the authority of the *mahārājas*. They opted to work outside caste organizations and, instead, worked within a social and political context which was governed by a fixed set of laws that assumed that all citizens were equal and were subject to a universal code of moral conduct. Mulji thus possessed a great advantage over Jadunāth. Being a member of an English-educated elite of urban leadership in the Presidency, he understood the intricacies of the British legal system and knew how to manipulate it to present his case against the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Mulji's use of prominent, educated *vaniyās*, eyewitnesses to alleged sexual indiscretions and, especially, his use of expert witnesses, all gave Mulji's case an aura of credibility which Jadunāth simply could not match. It was inevitable that Jadunāth would be outdone by the reformers in court. The moment he sued Mulji he stepped out of the comfortable world of his patronage network and wandered into the very unfamiliar world of the British legal system, he surrendered his power and authority to representatives of the colonial justice system which did not care for his standing as a *mahārāja*.

Devotees, meanwhile, throughout the whole controversy concerning the *mahārājas*, seemed to be struggling to reconcile the spiritual authority of their *mahārājas* with their moral frailties. Devotees seemed unwilling to break their ties completely with the *mahārājas* and instead coped with the controversy in various ways that ranged from limiting their contact with *mahārājas* to accepting the alleged behavior of the *mahārājas* if it could be proven that there was scriptural authority for it. Whether or not devotees would accept such behavior without scriptural sanction, however, seems unclear. Lowjee testified to the fact that there were a number of devotees within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* who believed in the full divinity of the *mahārājas*, but he never testified as to whether these devotees – if they truly existed – would have ignored the type of behavior alleged by Mulji against the *mahārājas*. It seemed that for the majority of devotees within the community, whatever the failings of their *mahārājas* may have been, the fact remained that the *mahārājas* were still invested with the authority to bestow divine grace upon the devotee within their community. As long as that fact remained, the *mahārājas* would always continue to be integral to their lives.

8.3 Conclusion: The Aftermath and the End of the ‘Golden Age’

The *mahārājas* of the Presidency never fully recovered from the Libel Case. Between 1870 and 1880, certain *vaniyās* made an attempt to undermine the authority of the *mahārājas* by building a network of new Vaiṣṇavite temples in Bombay that would not be under the *mahārājas*’ control. Others, meanwhile, began to publish their own small

theological journals for devotees in order to bypass the ability of *mahārājas* to control the doctrinal views of their devotees.³⁹ The reformers, in the meantime, continued their attempts to undermine the *mahārājas* in the public eye by joining hands with the fiery Dayānanda Sarasvāti who came to Bombay in 1875 to debate with *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees over the scriptural validity of their beliefs. Dayānanda's attacks on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* were venomous. He – like Mulji – had attacked what he believed was the perversity of the *mahārājas* and the incredulity of their devotees and went as far as to rename the community the “Path of Leprosy” or *Kuṣṭi Mārga*. His attacks on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* would ultimately culminate in his famous denunciation of the *mahārājas* written in his 1883 text, *Satyārtha Prakāś*. It was in this text that Dayānanda deemed the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to be a heterodox sect within Hinduism and the *mahārājas* false religious teachers whose alleged claims of divinity were contrary to the true Hinduism of the *Vedas*.⁴⁰

Thus by 1885 the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was in crisis. The repeated attacks upon the community by reformers like Dayānanda and Mulji along with the entire legal drama concerning Giridhar and Govardhanlāl had seriously weakened the bonds between devotees and the *mahārāja* forcing the community to turn inwards in an attempt to rehabilitate its image. Efforts – albeit minor ones – came from within the Presidency, but the real efforts came from Nathdvara under the auspices of the long suffering Govardhanlāl who attempted to use his position as *tilkāyat* to rebuild the image of the

³⁹ Shodhan, *Legal Representations of Khojas and Pushtimarga Vaishnava Politics*, pp. 246-247.

⁴⁰ See J.T.F Jordens, "Dayananda and Karsondas Mulji: Their Condemnation of the Vallabhacharyas," in *Dayananda Sarasvati: Essays on His Life* (Delhi: Manohar, 1998), pp. 140-162.

Puṣṭi Mārga after decades of turbulence within the community. In his lectures given to *Puṣṭi Mārga* devotees in the late nineteenth century, Govardhanlāl was searing in his criticism of the condition of the community over which he presided as *tilkāyat*.

Govardhanlāl criticized the ignorance of both *mahārājas* and devotees concerning the philosophy and history of their religious community lamenting that learned *mahārājas* who wrote erudite commentaries and exemplary devotees versed in the intricacies of *seva* were now a thing of the past in the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.

This ignorance among the *mahārāja* and their devotees, Govardhanlāl continued, was made even worse by what he termed their “turning away from proper conduct (*ācār vimukhtā*)”.⁴¹ He stated that, as devotees and *mahārājas* strayed away from the proper ethical conduct befitting Vaiṣṇavas, the type of *bhakti* preached by Vallabha would never have any effect on community members. Govardhanlāl thus proposed the importance of the *mahārājas* actively taking part in the future of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, by giving proper spiritual advice, educating devotees through the opening of schools to teach the younger generation of devotees about the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, and by publishing *Puṣṭi Mārga* texts in Sanskrit with readable commentaries accessible to the average devotee.⁴²

The emphasis on Sanskrit texts was not surprising. The *Puṣṭi Mārga* took great pains in the aftermath of the Libel Case to gain greater respectability by attempting to prove

⁴¹ Govardhanlāl, “Gosvāmītilak Śrī Govardhanlālji Mahārājaka Bhāṣaṇ” in Jaidev Gujargaud, ed., *Tilkāyat Gosvāmi Śrī 108 Govindalālji Mahārāj ko Samārpita Smṛti Granth* (Nāthdvāra: Nāthdvāra Mandir Maṇḍal, 1998), pp. 310-313.

⁴² Govardhanlāl, “Gosvāmītilak Śrī Govardhanlālji Mahārājaka Bhāṣaṇ,” p. 314.

that they too were inheritors of Hinduism's great Sanskrit tradition. After the Libel Case, Jadunāth had repudiated *Braj Bhāṣa* texts as being inaccurate representations of Vallabha's teachings and began to encourage his devotees to learn Sanskrit to truly understand *Puṣṭi Mārga* teachings in their pristine form.⁴³ Govardhanlāl, meanwhile, went on the offensive insisting that *Puṣṭi Mārga* theology was in direct accordance with Vedic scriptures. All *smṛti* texts, he stated, including the *purāṇas* helped to illuminate the deeper mysteries contained within the *Vedas* and thus it followed that the two key texts for the *Puṣṭi Mārga* – the *Bhagavāta Purāṇa* and the *Bhagavad Gīta* – both were Vedic in nature making the teachings of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* truly a part of Hinduism. Thus there was hardly anything illegitimate about *bhakti* in the eyes of Govardhanlāl. He pointed to those passages in the *Gīta* and the *Bhagavāta* that extolled *bhakti* as an easier path towards liberation, which could only be traversed with the devotee's willingness to subsist purely on the grace of Kṛṣṇa.⁴⁴

Devotees, however, were to live their lives within the framework of the *varnāśramadharma* system which was wrongly being criticized by reformers for ruining India by dividing rather uniting the country. Speaking on his father's behalf, Govardhanlāl's son, Dāmodarlāl, gave a public discourse in defense of the caste system citing the famous *Puruṣa Sūkta* hymn of the *Rg Veda* which proved that the caste system

⁴³ Shodhan, "Legal Representations of Khojas and Pushtimarga Vaishnava Politics", pp. 244-245.

⁴⁴ Govardhanlāl, "Sanātan dharm aur tadaḍagbhūt Puṣṭimārg" in Jaydeva Gujaragaḍ, ed., *Tilkāyat Gosvāmi Śrī 108 Govindalālji Mahārāja ko Samārpita Smṛti Granth*, pp. 317-319.

was divinely ordained and it did nothing but help the unity of India. Each individual performing their *dharma* according to their *jāti* standing was perfectly fine as long as all people were united in the belief that they were working to maintain the spiritual health of the nation. With that unity, Dāmodarlāl, argued, no harm could ever come to the country.⁴⁵

Thus in his quest to rehabilitate the image of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in the public eye, Govardhanlāl used his position as *tilakāyat* to embark on his own quest to return to a lost golden age. For Govardhanlāl, however, this meant trying to restore the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to its former glory under the leadership Vallabha and Viṭṭhalnāth. Govardhanlāl, like Vallabha himself, advocated a socially conservative view of Hindu society where individuals would maintain the unity of the caste system, but would lead their lives grounded firmly in their complete reliance on Kṛṣṇa. Within that vision, the *mahārājas* were to act as spiritual guides to their community, dispensing advice and, most of all, perpetuating the community's intellectual heritage through the production of theological tracts and commentaries pertaining to the teachings of Viṭṭhalnāth and Vallabha.

Govardhanlāl's efforts were somewhat successful at least when it came to dealing with affairs in Nathdvara. When he finally became of age and could rule over Nathdvara independently, Govardhanlāl threw all his efforts into rejuvenating the Nathdvara estate by spending money on public works and beautification projects, building hospitals, high

⁴⁵ Dāmodarlāl, "Vaiṣṇavom ke kartavya" in Gujaragaṇḍ, ed., *Tilakāyat Gosvāmī Śrī 108 Govindalālji Mahārāja ko Samārpita Smṛti Granth*, pp. 300-302.

schools for boys and girls, as well as trying to tighten the security of Nathdvara with the establishment of more guard posts. Govardhanlāl tried to restore some nobility to the position of the *tilkāyat* by modeling his court on the Mughal court of the emperor Akbar and mimicking Akbar's image as a patron of the arts by keeping linguists, poets, Sanskrit scholars, musicians, and painters in his court.

Govardhanlāl also evinced a deep interest in *seva* by making detailed innovations concerning the adornment of Śrīnāthjī, reconceptualizing the manner in which devotional poetry was to be performed during *seva*, and by attempting to add more artistic complexity to the *seva* rituals by choosing color schemes for the wall hangings placed behind the deity to symbolize the passionate union between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. All these innovations would ultimately be brought together in Govardhanlāl's well-known and spectacular celebration in 1910 of the *śaḍ ṛtū kā utsava* where all the festivals associated with the six seasons of the year were celebrated on one single day. Govardhanlāl thus had ushered in what people came to call the "golden age" for Nathdvara and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in general. Govardhanlāl had given a vibrancy to Nathdvara that had been missing during the long and difficult reign of his infamous father prompting the Udaipur *darbār* to restore the *tilkāyat*'s rights and privileges to independently rule over Nathdvara.⁴⁶ The 'golden era', however, came to be a rather unfortunate end thanks largely to Govardhanlāl's son, Dāmodarlāl.

⁴⁶ Vairāgi, *Śrī Nāthdvāra kā Saṃskṛtik kā Itihāsa*, pp. 24-26.

Dāmodarlāl by all accounts was a dashing young man. He was known to be extremely athletic with a love for wrestling, cricket, and swimming and was even to known to have been proficient in billiards and chess. He took after his father in his love for *seva* and also built his reputation as a scholar through his commentaries and public speeches, which reiterated Govardhanlāl's emphasis on the *Puṣṭi Mārga* place in Hinduism and the ethical and religious responsibilities of community members.⁴⁷ Thus Dāmodarlāl had become universally accepted as being a worthy heir to his father and was expected to build on his father's legacy and add greater glory to the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, which by the early decades of the twentieth century, was finally able to live down the embarrassment of the Maharaja Libel Case. In 1932, however, a middle aged Dāmodarlāl did something that would prove to be disastrous for the fortunes of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.⁴⁸ The very married heir apparently fell head over heels in love with a dancer named Hansa and all but publicly declared his love for her by allowing himself and Hansa to be seen and photographed together in public. Neither the residents of Nathdvara nor Govardhanlāl were particularly amused. Residents in Nathdvara were becoming unhappy with Dāmodarlāl's behavior while Govardhanlāl desperately did all he could to end the relationship between Dāmodarlāl and his mistress. Dāmodarlāl instead decided to leave Nathdvara to live in the northern hill station of Nainital with a party that included his wife and mistress only to return a few months later at the insistence of his now aged

⁴⁷ Vairāgi, *Śrī Nāthdvāra kā Saṃskrtik kā Itihās*, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁸ The following account is based on what is found in Rajendra Jindel, *Culture of a Sacred Town: A Sociological Study of Nathdvara*. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976), pp. 198-199.

father. It proved to be a mistake. The residents of Nathdvara, incensed at Hamsa's return, forced her to leave Nathdvara and soon after Dāmodarlāl joined her in Simla.

Govardhanlāl attempted one more time to end the relationship, but the emotional and physical exhaustion proved to be too much. He died in 1934 without having succeeded in changing the mind of his son who was expected to succeed his father to the throne of Nathdvara. It never happened. The *darbār*, which had been looking on quietly throughout the whole affair, deposed Dāmodarlāl on the grounds that his marital affair made him spiritually unfit to succeed his illustrious father. Dāmodarlāl was exiled to Udaipur while his young son, Govind, was deemed the new *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara and placed under the direct supervision of the *darbār* who administered all of the Nathdvara estates.

What had transpired seemed to be a curious cross between the Libel Case and the Giridhar affair. Another *tilkāyat* was overthrown by the *darbār* and replaced with his minor son because the *tilkāyat* was flaunting his extra-marital affair openly in front of his own devotees. Devotees found themselves at odds with their *mahārāja*, the *Puṣṭi Marga*'s reputation fell in the public eye, while the *tilkāyat* of Nathdvara lost his estates to the *darbār* never again to retain control. Thus by the early decades of the twentieth century, the *Puṣṭi Marga* found itself reliving its past once again as Dāmodarlāl's relationship with his mistress managed in a matter of two years to drag the *Puṣṭi Marga* right back to the same scandal-plagued position it had found itself in the mid-nineteenth century. Govardhanlāl's efforts to regain respectability for the *Puṣṭi Marga* were completely undone. The golden age was over.

Conclusion: Themes in the History of the Puṣṭi Mārga

The history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was indeed a most remarkable one. Vallabha had founded the *Puṣṭi Mārga* at a time when the stresses placed upon Hindu society with the proliferation of replica Sultanates in the fifteenth century prompted responses from Vaiṣṇavite communities to not wholeheartedly reject the *varṇāśrāmadharma* system which formed the framework for the Hindu social order, but to reinterpret its values to provide for a newer and more accessible form of religiosity. This involved downplaying the importance of worship carried out by Sanskritically educated ritual specialists for a more direct form of religiosity that stressed the importance of establishing a direct relationship with the Divine through the cultivation of a passionate, fervent form of religious love.

Vallabha, the founder of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, reacted to the disintegration of the Sultanate by travelling in areas where Hindus were affected directly by the turmoil of the time preaching a religious worldview that sought to reaffirm the *varṇāśrāmadharma* system but by encompassing it within a religious framework of devotion that stressed complete reliance upon the grace of Kṛṣṇa. Vallabha, like his contemporary Caitanya, made Braj the central site of pilgrimage for his devotees who initially came mostly from the mercantile communities of Gujarat. Vallabha's religious message offered an attractive religious view to help cope with the social upheavals associated with the establishment of regional Sultanates. Vallabha did not seek to overturn the *varṇāśrāmadharma* system and instead offered to mercantile communities the prospect of pursuing their prescribed duties as merchants within the Hindu caste system while still pursuing a fulfilling religious life.

For the conservative Hindu mercantile communities who were the dominant social class in what was a region long steeped in Vaiṣṇavite religious culture, the patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* not only gave them a sense of stability, but, in the process, the social prestige of mercantile communities continued to increase within Hindu society by allowing them to assume a more prominent role in Hindu society through their continuing patronage of the community's *mahārājas*. This concern of the mercantile classes of Gujarat with prestige, social stability, and religious patronage would continue into the nineteenth century. Business communities continued to pursue their interests within the established order of the colonial government and used their wealth to further deepen their involvement in the religious activities of the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. This not only entailed financially supporting the *maharajas* through donations, but managing the finances of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and using their influence to aid *maharajas* in the internal disputes of the community.

Vallabha's descendants, however, would extend the base for its support by not only attracting mercantile communities, but also political notables that included the Mughal administration. Mughal interest in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* seems to have been a reflection of the tendency for the Mughals to use patronage as a form of state-building which entailed encompassing religious communities within the larger framework of the state by promising them tax-free lands in return for their loyalty to the state. It was upon these tax-free lands where Hindu rulers absorbed into the Mughal nobility carried out temple building projects which stood as symbols of how a certain segment of Hindu society was able to reassert its religious aspirations under the watchful eye of the Mughal state.

Mughal patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* tended to conform to the general pattern of Mughal religious policy. The Mughals granted tax-free land to the community in return for their promise to join the Mughal “army of prayer” and remain in continual prayer for the welfare of the Mughal State. It was this patronage that allowed the *Puṣṭi Mārga* to flourish in the Braj region and parallel the type of prosperity enjoyed by their Gauḍiya counterparts. Thus the relationship between the Gauḍiyas and the *Puṣṭi Mārga* tended to reflect the type of competitive spirituality that was characteristic of the religious landscape in medieval North India. Thus just as the *Gauḍiyas* had created their own unique sacred geography of Braj that centered around Vrindavan, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* created its own sacred geography of Braj centered around Gokul and Govardhan that would be maintained with the aid of the mercantile devotees from Gujarat.

Rajput patronage of the, *Puṣṭi Mārga*, however, seems to have come much later in the community’s history when the members of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* began to approach Rajput kingdoms looking for shelter after the Jat rebellions. Two of the houses - the first and the third houses – ultimately decided to settle in Mewar where they both followed a pattern of religious networking that was very similar to what they had pursued when settled in Braj. Once the focal points for community pilgrimage in Mewar were established in Nathdvara and Kankaroli, the *maharajas* of both houses began the process of moving outwards and slowly building ties with various kingdoms in Rajasthan until they had created a large patronage network among some of the most important kingdoms in the region such as Jaipur, Bikaner, Kishangarh, and Kota all of whom declared their support of the *Puṣṭi*

Mārga through their financial patronage and theological support for the community's religious beliefs.

Rajput patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* again would prove consistent with past patterns of patronage for the community. Religious patronage from kingdoms like Kishangarh, Kota, and Mewar were done out of theological commitment to the community, but again patronage of the community was always linked to matters of state-building and prestige. Prestige was the reason that Rajput kingdoms found themselves in a bidding war for the opportunity to shelter the first house and prestige again was the reason that Rajput rulers placed so much pressure on Tod to ensure the return of *svarupas* to their kingdoms during the 1822 *saptasvarupotsava* celebrations was a fear that the loss of a sacred image would result in a loss of prestige and prosperity for their kingdoms. Patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was thus linked to socio-economic concerns and would also be linked to the concerns of state-building. Kota's involvement in the *saptasvarupotsava* ceremonies was linked to furthering their political ambitions and while the Mewar house was very theologically committed to the *Puṣṭi Mārga*, it was equally hard to ignore that the settlement of the two houses was also linked to Mewar's need to reconstruct itself after being battered by the Mughals.

Guru and Kings: Who Held Power ?

In Mewar, the *Puṣṭi Mārga* succeeded in duplicating and eventually surpassing the prosperity it had enjoyed in Braj. In Braj, the *mahārājas* enjoyed the status of being wealthy religious leaders and landowners (*zamīndārs*), but the Mughals ensured that noblemen in the court and *zamīndār* in the countryside could never build independent power bases that would allow them to challenge the authority of the empire. This was not the case with the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Mewar. The *mahārājas* accepted patronage as recognition for their services at special occasions such as coronations or investiture ceremonies but did this necessarily mean that there was a clear relationship between the two parties based on a relationship of dominance and subordination ? It is not very clear. The Kankaroli and Nathdvara were politically subordinate to the *darbār* prior to their acquisition of *jāgīrdārī* status, but they still had the means to pressure the *darbār* or subvert its authority if they so desired.

The *mahārājas* derived incomes from other estates outside the boundaries of Mewar providing them with enough financial security to give them a relative amount of independence from the control of the *darbār*. The *mahārājas* also had a very powerful weapon in the form of *svarupas* which they could use to place pressure upon their patrons. This is precisely what occurred during the Giridhar affair. Giridhar manipulated the colonial legal system most skillfully against his son and former patron and succeeded in placing both the *darbar* and Govardhanlāl in a state of panic over the very thought of possibly losing custody of the Śrīnāthjī image .

Defining the *darbār* – *mahārāja* relationship was equally difficult because of how individual *mahārājas* reacted to the acquisition of *jāgīrdār* status from the *darbār*. The Kankaroli house found itself becoming an increasingly close ally under the leadership of Padmāvati while matters took the exact opposite direction in Nathdvara where Giridhar used his dual status as a *guru* and a *jāgīrdār* to build his own power base, repeatedly defy the authority of the *darbār*, and then finally taking advantage of the weakened state of the royal court under Sajjan Singh to declare his independence from Mewar.

The subsequent power struggle that arose made it almost impossible to tell who had the upper hand in the ongoing drama between Giridhar and the *darbar*. The *darbār* became the paramount power in its relationship with Nathdvara, but Giridhar nonetheless continued to harass both his son and former patron through his use of colonial law and through his use of his supporters in the Bombay *vaniyā* community to nearly drive the Nathdvara temple into financial ruin. There was no doubt, however, that the *darbar* was very reluctant in taking the actions that it did with the Nathdvara house. The *darbār* had for many centuries taken great pride and honor in being the patron to a religious community whose spiritual heads were equally their *gurus* and consequently, it was inevitable that the Regency Council felt conflicted about wanting to abdicate its role in this situation as the protector and patron of the Nathdvara house. The punishment the *darbar* eventually meted out to Giridhar reflected how deep-rooted this conflict really was and how unresolved it remained.

Gods or Gurus

The conflict that the *darbār* felt over its role as patron to the Nathdvara house was paralleled by the feelings of conflict that the large body of devotees felt upon whom the *mahārājas* also depended upon for their patronage. The *seṭhs* of the *vaniyā* community had been the financial backbone of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* since the lifetime of Vallabha and remained so into the nineteenth century by collecting donations, managing the community's considerable financial resources, and acting as well-organized lobby groups. This was very evident during the whole affair with Giridhar where winning *vaniyā* support became key for both father and son. It was support from the business community that allowed Giridhar to alienate funds from Nathdvara while for Govardhanlāl, it was *vaniyā* capital that kept him from languishing in jail during his visit to Bombay.

The *seṭhs* were also important by acting as the intermediaries between the *mahārājas* and the majority of *vaniyā* devotees for whom the *mahārājas* had been central to their spiritual lives for generations. Devotees believed that since Kṛṣṇa had authorized Vallabha to initiate individuals into the *Puṣṭi Mārga* that divine authorization was equally passed on to Vallabha's descendants. Thus *mahārājas* became the object of the devotee's adoration for, as manifestations of the undifferentiated Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, they were the only individuals who had the authority to manifest and administer the purifying Divine grace necessary to set the devotee off on the path of devotion. In other words, just

as Kṛṣṇa was adored by Vallabha for having taught him the Path of Grace, devotees accorded the *mahārājas* a similar type of adoration for, as partial manifestations of Kṛṣṇa, the *mahārājas* held the sole right to reconcile the individual with the Divine.

The devotees of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* had tended to take this relationship rather for granted. Many were individuals whose families had been long-standing members of the community and it was clear that events that lead up to the Libel Case forced devotees to reflect for the first time on their patronage of the *mahārājas* and to what extent they were to honor them. For some of those devotees, however, that process of self-examination had to take place under the uncomfortable glare of the British legal system where they did the best they could to articulate, with the limited religious vocabulary at their disposal, the theological complexities surrounding the position of the *maharaja* in relation to his devotees. What emerged from the court testimony was the image of a *vaniyā* community that acknowledged there was a very real problem when it came to the allegations of sexual misconduct against the *mahārājas*; but devotees were very hesitant to completely sever their ties with their gurus. Devotees either seemed to accept the infallibility of the *mahārājas* or tried to find some way to voice their displeasure by attempting to restrict their contact with their spiritual leaders.

The effect of restricting one's proximity to the *maharajas*, however, would only be marginally successful since such conduct was equated as a breach of proper *vaniya* honor and conduct. This is what Jivanlal seemed to be saying when he stated that preventing women from visiting *Puṣṭi Mārga* temples would be detrimental to the financial well-being of the *mahārājas* and their temples. The possible loss of financial patronage for the

Bombay shrines would be the equivalent to rejecting the *vaniyā* community's *Vaiṣṇava dharma* to honor and support their spiritual leaders. This was something devotees were not willing to do. Such an act would be construed as repudiating the sanctity of the entire lineage of *gurus* within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and could have possibly lead to rejection from the larger *vaniyā* community.

The Libel Case and the Giridhar affair thus left both the royal and mercantile patrons of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* torn between two conflicting notions of proper conduct that remained unsolved by the end of the nineteenth century. The *vaniyā* community, on the one hand, found itself torn between its duty to maintain the internal unity of its community and its centuries old commitment as patrons of the *mahārājas*, while the *darbār*, on the other hand, found itself torn between upholding its duty to maintaining political order and its religious duty to protect the Nathdvara house. In the midst of this, the *mahārājas* found that being *gurus* descended from the illustrious Vallabha was not enough upon to maintain a community of grace. The disaffected members of the *vaniyā* community had managed to get the better of the *mahārājas* in the Presidency; the public viewed the *mahārājas* as sexually depraved *gurus*, while Nathdvara and the *darbār* struggled to put their ugly past behind them only to eventually find their efforts undermined by Dāmodarlāl. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it became most apparent that the state of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* was far from reflecting the ideal community of Grace that Govardhanlāl wished for in his discourses of the late nineteenth century. The history of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* at the beginning of the twentieth century instead began with the image of a declining religious aristocracy who had lost the confidence of its devotees.

It is acknowledged that this thesis ends on a less than positive image of a fragmented community at odds with their religious leaders does not always present the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in flattering light. It is, however, hoped that this is not interpreted as an attempt to perpetuate the Orientalist stereotype of a declining, degenerate Hinduism or that it is interpreted as a deliberate affront to the reputation of *Puṣṭi Mārga* Vaiṣṇavas, their *mahārājas*, and their religious traditions.

The intention of this thesis has been, on the contrary, quite the opposite. It has been an attempt to move away from perpetuating old stereotypes about the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and the nature of Indian society by trying to properly contextualize the history of this community in an effort not to caricature it, but to bring out its richness and complexity. The history of this community shows how untenable it would be to adhere to a view of Indian society based upon an absolute distinction between the impure world of the mundane and the pure world of the spiritual. The patronage of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* by its mercantile and royal patrons was not due purely to theological commitment nor just due to the themes of state-building, economic expansion, and social influence. Both were very intertwined creating a world in which the interests, ambitions, and personalities of both patron and client constantly impinged upon the other creating tensions, conflicts, and ambiguities in Indian society that defy any one, easy explanation.

Glossary

Glossary of Names and Terms

Annakut A festival in which a large mountain of rice and other foodstuffs are offered to in front of Kṛṣṇa in order to mark the episode in the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* when he lifted Mount Govardhan on one finger.

Bhakti Devotion

Darbār Royal court.

Dvārkaḍhīś The name of the image of Kṛṣṇa worshipped in the third house of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in Kāṅkārōḷī.

Gopīs The milkmaids of Braj whose amorous relations with Kṛṣṇa are held in Kṛṣṇaite theology as a metaphor for the type of love that is to be cultivated between the devotee and Kṛṣṇa.

Gosvāmi An honorific given to spiritual leaders in Vaiṣṇava communities including the *Puṣṭi Mārga*. Thus a Gosvāmi (or sometimes “Gosain”) is used in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* as another way of referring to a *mahārāja*.

Jāgīr The term used in Rajasthan to refer to estates held by members of the Rajput nobility. Noblemen generally had full administrative control over their estates making them practically independent of the royal court to which they were to owe their loyalty.

Jāgīrdār A nobleman who possesses a *jāgīr* or estate

Jāti Refers to the various sub-castes into which each of the four castes of Hindu society are divided.

Khalsa The term used in Rajasthan to refer to crown lands or those lands that were under the direct control of the royal court.

Mahārāja The honorific used to address the male descendants of Vallabha who acted as the spiritual guides within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.

Mahārāṇa The title given to the rulers of the Mewar royal house. Also at times used as a general term when referring to the kings that ruled over different Rajput kingdoms.

Maryādā Mārga The term used by Vallabha to refer to traditional forms of Hindu religiosity such as Vedic sacrifices, asceticism, pilgrimages, or temple rituals which were rejected by Vallabha for what he believed was the more efficacious spiritual path of devotion (*bhakti*).

Saptasvarūpa: Refers to the seven images distributed to each house of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* when spiritual authority was divided by Viṭṭhālānāth amongst his seven sons. The image of Śrīnāthjī is not included within the listing of the seven images for its pre-eminence as the central image of worship within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* meant that the image could be worshipped equally by all houses within the community.

Saptasvarūpotsava: The festival celebrated within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* when all seven principal images of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* are worshipped together at one time along with the image of Śrīnāthjī. The first was celebrated during the time of Viṭṭhālānāth with two more celebrated in the nineteenth century.

Śuddhādvaita: The philosophical system of “Pure Qualified Non-Dualism” promulgated by Vallabha.

Seva: The term to designate the type of worship performed to Kṛṣṇa within the *Puṣṭi Mārga*.

Svarūpa: The term used to refer to an image of Kṛṣṇa worshipped within the *Puṣṭi Mārga* in sectarian temples and homes.

Śrīnāthjī: The image of Kṛṣṇa discovered by Vallabha in Braj where it was first worshipped before being removed to Rajasthan. This is the principal image of worship in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* housed since the late seventeenth century in Nathdvara.

Tilkāyat: Translated as ‘head’ or ‘chief’ The special designation given to the *mahārājas* who are the heads of the first house of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and consequently are the custodians of the Śrīnāthjī image. Their role as custodians of the Śrīnāthjī image has given them a certain pre-eminence over the other *mahārājas* of the *Puṣṭi Mārga* and hence they have been given the title of *tilkayāt*.

Varna: The term used in Hindu scriptures to refer to the four classes of Hindu society: the priestly class (*brahmin*), the warrior class (*kshatriya*), the trading class (*vaishya*), and menial classes (*shudras*).

Varnāśramadharma: Refers to the duties (*dharma*) to be carried out by members of each of the four Hindu castes (*varṇas*) as they pass through the four stages (*āśramas*) of life prescribed in Hindu scriptures.

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